

READER

Jack Riedy goes
behind the flash of
Chicago DIY video
production duo
New Trash

Olivier Kugler
creates comics
reportage on
Syrian refugees

Ben Joravsky
explores the
Lincoln Yard TIF

Maya Dukmasova
looks into a lawsuit at
Ogden Elementary

FINAL
FRONTIER

"Chicago New Media 1973-1992"
pays tribute to the city's often
unsung contribution to video
games and digital art.

By CAROLINE PICARD

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

AS THE FIRST SNOWFALLS OF WINTER pummel our work-weary faces, it's difficult to keep in mind that Chicago can be a safe haven, a destination for refugees, a warm and comforting environment for folks escaping the ravages of poverty and government oppression and war. Some felt it viscerally this week, as American border officials fired tear gas canisters at toddlers during an otherwise peaceful march by asylum seekers at the Mexican border. I was reminded only when my holiday plans fell through at the last minute and I lucked into a Syrian feast, served up with copies of the *Arab American News*, a community newspaper in Dearborn, Michigan. Long after I stopped inhaling *mujadara* I pored over community reports of increasing hate crimes and the potential for peace talks in Yemen.

We're lucky here. The streets get plowed,

the trains run in all weather, and Chicagoans tend to take care of their own. We celebrate residents with a new City Life feature called Public Service Announcement, in which we'll highlight a local free or low-cost service available in the city—offered by the city itself or, just as often, by organizations, entrepreneurs, and kind-hearted individuals. Our digital managing editor, Karen Hawkins, kicks off the series, alongside Isa Giallorenzo's celebration of everyday fashion, Street View.

The city also offers plenty of distractions. We've got the lowdown on holiday theater, some great insights into this city's role in the artistic field of new media, and a fun music feature on video makers New Trash. Our Book Swap feature returns, in which a staffer trades reading recommendations with a local lit hero—this time with culture editor Aimee Levitt and Sarah

Hollenbeck, co-owner of Women & Children First bookstore. Plus theater, film, and dance reviews, with all your music section favorites: In Rotation, Gossip Wolf, and every show worth seeing, previewed.

But this city is embedded in a strife-ridden world, and our comics feature this week comes from outside of Chicago—outside of the country, even, from a German comics journalist friend based in London named Olivier Kugler. His new book, *Escaping Wars and Waves: Encounters with Syrian Refugees* (Penn State University Press) showcases his stunning illustration technique and his thoughtful reporting on asylum seekers around the globe. I'm pleased to offer this excerpt from the book and hope it inspires you to think about the role this city plays in an often harsh world.

—ANNE ELIZABETH MOORE

COMICS FEATURE

Report from a Syrian refugee camp in Iraqi Kurdistan

An excerpt from the comics journalism collection *Escaping Wars and Waves*

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MUSIC FEATURE

New Trash has panache

These Chicago DIY videographers do a lot with very, very little.

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CITY LIFE



ISA GIALLORENZO

STREET VIEW

Chill mode

Marvell Wesley and his mini-me stroll in style on 95th St.

“LAIDBACK, ON CHILL mode. Not too flashy, but eye-catching,” says Marvell Wesley of his style, inspired by Jay-Z, Common, and “the old” Kanye West—“Through-the-fire Kanye West,” he clarifies. “I try to be noticeable when I dress—different but always comfortable.” Since he works out “every day, all day,” athletic wear is a staple in his wardrobe; still, Wesley puts a lot of attention into detail, such as matching his green Nspired T-shirt with the Lacoste alligator logo on his windbreaker. He also makes sure his son, Logan, looks as sharp as he does: “I try to dress him the same way I do, because I know he looks up to me,” says the 33-year-old truck driver. Even though Wesley needs to wear a uniform for his job, he always makes sure it is “crisp, nice, and neat”: “You should always dress the part, because you never know what will happen.”—ISA GIALLORENZO



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CITY LIFE

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KRIS KASPEREK

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Womencare Counseling Center

No more claims you can't afford therapy.

By **KAREN HAWKINS**

I once casually mentioned my therapist to a friend who flinched, shocked that I was so open about being in—hushed tone—therapy. Listen, I've been through some shit in my life, and I'll shout from the rooftops that my amazing therapist is the only reason I'm not shouting from the rooftops.

I met my therapist at Womencare Counseling Center in Evanston (she's since gone into private practice; don't ask for her name because I'm not sharing her), and at the time I was drawn there as much by their sliding scale pricing structure as their commitment to feminist-focused mental health services.

Individual counseling sessions with

postgraduate therapists start as low as \$25 per 50-minute session, and sessions with the staff therapists range from \$90 to \$200, according to the website. All of Womencare's fees are based on clients' ability to pay, and I can attest that they take people's financial circumstances into account.

In addition to individual counseling, they offer couples, family, and group counseling, as well as community and professional workshops. I've taken advantage of almost every kind of service they offer, and friends and I have regularly swapped recommendations for counselors.

If you're new to or returning to therapy, the

rule of thumb I've heard is to interview at least three providers before you commit to one, and it's definitely worth a trip to Womencare to see if one of their folks is a good fit for you. I'd highly recommend them if you're navigating current or past trauma, if you have pesky patterns in your life you're looking to upend and/or if you need a growth-focused therapist you can't outsmart. Womencare's tough-love therapists aren't here for your "let's just talk about my cat for 50 minutes every time," and I've appreciated the focus on healing and progress. All at a price I could afford. 

 **@ChiefRebelle**



Lincoln Yards
COURTESY OF STERLING BAY

POLITICS

The Lincoln Yards TIF

Rahm's pet development project will benefit development firm Sterling Bay—but cost Chicagoans

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

It was only a few weeks ago that Mayor Rahm delivered a budget address in which he praised himself for doing the responsible—although boring and unpopular—thing of raising taxes to free future Chicagoans of onerous obligations.

And then, wham, last month his administration announced he was rushing through a haphazardly thought out and deceptively promoted TIF extravaganza that would hammer taxpayers with a nasty one-two punch of higher property taxes and less money for schools and other essential services.

So much for that responsible budget thing.

I'm talking about the Lincoln Yards Tax Increment Financing district. Actually, it's called the Cortland/Chicago River TIF, but it might as well be the Lincoln Yards TIF 'cause its boundaries pretty much correspond to the project that Sterling Bay, a development firm, wants to build along the east and west sides of the Chicago River between North and Fullerton.

Oh, if Rahm were only so accommodating to, say, the mental health needs of low-income people in high-crime areas.

Now, there are many reasons to be dubious

about the Lincoln Yards proposal—a massive array of skyscrapers, condos, restaurants, a soccer stadium, offices, hotels, restaurants, and entertainment venues.

You might object to the congestion it will cause, its design, the lack of transparency in the connection between the developer and the city, or the roughshod way they're treating the Hideout music club.

But for the moment let me talk money, as in how much this sucker's going to cost you even as the mayor and his aides contend it's an "investment," not a "giveaway," that "will more than pay for itself," as Planning Commissioner David Reifman recently told *Crains*.

So just in case there's anyone in Chicago naive enough to fall for Rahm's line, let me take the moment to explain—once again—how this TIF thing works.

When the City Council approves a TIF district, it basically freezes for 23 years the amount of property taxes the schools, parks, library, city, county, etc. can collect from property owners in that district.

As property values in the TIF district rise, the new tax dollars that property owners must

pay get diverted from the schools and parks, etc. into a bank account largely controlled by the mayor.

Which gives the mayor a lot of power. Thus explaining why Rahm loves TIFs so much.

In this case, Mayor Rahm is proposing to spend the money building new roads, bridges, and other infrastructure so that Sterling Bay can build Lincoln Yards.

Since Sterling Bay is not directly receiving the money you can't call it a handout to a developer, the mayor's arguing.

At the moment the land is mostly industrial or vacant. If Sterling Bay builds Lincoln Yards it will become some of the most valuable residential and commercial property in the city.

Property owners there would be paying tens of millions of dollars in property taxes. But the vast majority of this money would—as I said—be diverted from the schools to the TIF.

As the largest property owner in the TIF district, Sterling Bay would basically be allowed to take the money it would ordinarily have to pay to the city and schools and spend it on itself. Or its Lincoln Yards project.

Think of it as though you told the mayor—Hey, Rahm, I won't be paying property taxes to the schools this year. Instead, I'll use that money to build a new garage.

Who knows—fork over enough in campaign contributions and he might let you get away with it.

And all the time that Sterling Bay is paying property taxes to its own not-so-little TIF piggy bank, our schools, police, fire, parks, etc. will need more money to keep up with rising

costs. So the powers that be will have to raise your property taxes, Chicago, to compensate for the money they're not getting from Sterling Bay in its TIF.

And, by the way, it's not as though the Lincoln Yards development won't itself need city services. Like any other community, it will need police to patrol the streets and fire-fighters to put out fires and snow removers to remove the snow. Why, the parents who buy those condos may actually want to send their children to public schools. So they'll need money for that.

But for 23 years, the property owners in Lincoln Yards won't be contributing much in the way of property taxes for these basic city services, 'cause the bulk of their property tax dollars will be diverted to the Cortland TIF.

In short, the generous taxpayers of Chicago will spend hundreds of millions of dollars transforming the area so Sterling Bay can make even more money developing it.

Nothing against Sterling Bay, but if they want to build Lincoln Yards so much, they should pay for their own roads and bridges and such.

Just as you would have to pay for a new garage.

Now, if the cost if those bridges and roads make Lincoln Yards too expensive for Sterling Bay, or any developer, to build—oh, well. That would fall into the category of—sorry, but that's not our problem.

My guess is that if left alone most of this area would slowly and systematically develop just fine on its own—as the rest of nearby Lincoln Park, Wicker Park, and Bucktown have done.

Without a TIF, all of the new tax dollars generated by new development in this area would flow into the public coffers, helping pay for schools and fire and police and so forth.

I know this stuff is complicated and confusing—that's another reason why the city's been able to exploit the TIF scam for all these years. People just get confused and throw up their hands and go back to cheering for the Bears.

Or whatever they do to dull the pain of existence.

A few weeks ago, I wrote about how Mayor Rahm was leaving a growing mountain of obligations—including billions in pension debt—for his successor.

I hope the mayoral candidates running to succeed Rahm will use their clout to block this deal. Otherwise that mountain of debt will grow even higher. [\[A\]](#)

[@BennyJshow](#)

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Undue process

CPS waited months to terminate a principal accused of falsifying attendance records, leaving a historic school merger at stake.

By MAYA DUKMASOVA



COURTESY MICHAEL BEYER

With the merger of Ogden and Jenner elementary schools underway, Chicago Public Schools earlier this month removed the well-respected principal of the former from his post of three years. Dr. Michael Beyer, who's worked for the district since 2003 and has earned accolades as a principal, was accused by the Chicago Board of Education's inspector general of falsifying attendance records across Ogden's three K-12 campuses comprising some 1,900 students. Now Beyer is suing the school district claiming he hasn't been given a fair chance to defend himself.

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) delivered its findings to CPS in a heavily redacted report dated June 29, 2018. It claimed that investigators identified "75 instances where students were temporarily unenrolled and re-enrolled within the same school year," over the course of Beyer's tenure. The OIG claimed that Beyer and other school staff improperly directed parents to unenroll students who had to travel abroad with family or had other reasons to miss school for long stretches so as not to have to mark the students as absent.

However, the report provides no evidence that staff did this in an effort to fudge attendance numbers. At one point, Beyer is briefly quoted in an apparent admission of improperly handling some students' attendance records: "When confronted with emails showing that he condoned or encouraged the practice, Beyer admitted 'Clearly, I did break the policy,' and that he 'messed up.'" (Beyer's lawyers contest that their client admitted to any wrongdoing.)

For reasons the district hasn't made clear, Beyer wasn't removed from his position at Ogden until November 1. This was the date when he first learned of the report, according to a lawsuit he filed in the Circuit Court of Cook County two weeks ago. Beyer, whose removal from the school was met with vehement protests from Ogden parents and the local school council, is now claiming that the district has violated due process by calling a suspension hearing without allowing him to examine evidence against him and without making it clear what rules would be used to determine disciplinary actions against him.

All of this comes as the merger of Ogden Elementary in the Gold Coast with Jenner Academy in the Cabrini-Green neighborhood enters its first year. The merger effectively closes Jenner and consolidates its students with Ogden students across two buildings. This is the school closure that sociologist and education activist Eve Ewing recently described to the *Reader* as "really interesting because no one even calls it a school closing ... because it was a community-driven process."

Beyer was integral to the process, along with Jenner principal Robert Croston, who died unexpectedly earlier this year. Though some parents and CPS insiders were reportedly against the consolidation of the schools, the two principals worked to ensure that the merger was transparent and acceptable to most students and parents in both schools' communities.

When asked why they waited four months to begin disciplinary proceedings against Beyer, thereby disrupting the school year during a highly scrutinized period at Ogden, CPS communications director Michael Pass-

man provided only a general statement:

"Based on the facts of this case, the district is in agreement with the Inspector General's assessment that removing Principal Beyer is appropriate and necessary. A highly qualified Acting Principal will be supporting the school in the days ahead, and the district is committed to providing all necessary supports to ensure the merger of the Jenner and Ogden communities continues to be successful."

Beyer couldn't speak on the record. One of his attorneys, Eric Schmitt, reached by phone Monday, said that the goal of the lawsuit is to see Beyer "restored to his position as principal at Ogden."

Schmitt said Beyer's alleged admission of guilt as presented by the OIG's report was a quote taken out of context, and that his client never told any parents they had to unenroll their students. Rather, he said, the decisions to unenroll were made by families who didn't want their children to accrue truancy records with CPS while in school abroad.

Beyer's lawsuit was filed the day before CPS was to hold a "pre-suspension hearing," an administrative procedure where a hearing officer would decide whether he'd be suspended with or without pay, and whether there would be further consideration regarding his retention. This hearing was overseen not by a neutral third party but by Mary Ernesti, who also works as director of employee engagement at CPS. Beyer was told he could bring a lawyer to the hearing, but his lawyers' advance requests for information on the evidence that would be presented during the hearing went unanswered.

"What we're asking for is due process and a part of due process is knowing what the

accusations against him are," said Schmitt, who added that the legal team has still not seen the unredacted OIG report after again requesting it at the first of three scheduled pre-suspension hearing dates.

All of this reflects poorly on CPS, Schmitt suggested. "It's similar to what happened in Washington last week with the Jim Acosta case," he said. "The White House suspended his press pass and when pressed they had no standard or rules he was alleged to have breached."

Beyer is bringing his suit in conjunction with the Ogden local school council, which voted just last August to extend Beyer's contract through 2023—under Illinois law, LSCs, composed of teachers, parents, and community representatives, are supposed to have final say over the hiring and firing of principals unless CPS finds principals to have committed irredeemable and egregious violations of district policies.

The day before filing the complaint, Ogden's LSC passed a resolution decrying the OIG's report as "highly suspect" and "lacking substantiation." It noted that Beyer's efforts to curb students' absences were ignored and criticized the OIG for "having failed to interview the families noted in the report, thereby preventing an accurate understanding of the complex needs of a school that commonly serves and supports international families, many of whom have dual citizenship and requirements to work abroad for periods of the year." Sources with knowledge of the Ogden community interviewed by the *Reader* said that some families go abroad for diplomatic, humanitarian, or corporate work for months at a time, enrolling their students at foreign

Office of
Inspector General
Chicago Board of Education
Nicholas Schuler, Inspector General

SUMMARY REPORT

OIG 18-00134
June 29, 2018

SUBJECTS

1. Michael Beyer
Principal
Ogden Elementary School
Employee ID 000131517

2. [REDACTED]

3. [REDACTED]

4. [REDACTED]

5. [REDACTED]

CASE INITIATION

The OIG initiated this investigation after it received a complaint alleging that a parent at William B. Ogden Elementary School was told she would have to unenroll her son after informing the school that he needed to miss three days of school for a family trip. She was told that this was the policy for extended absences.

FINDINGS

1. Under Principal Michael Beyer's administration, William B. Ogden Elementary School falsified attendance primarily through the improper use of out of district (Code 33) and homeschool (Code 40) transfer codes. Students with extended absences for various reasons, including for family vacations or because of visa issues, would be unenrolled and coded as transferring out of district or to

schools or temporarily homeschooling.

The November 14 hearing was, according to Schmitt, a troubling glimpse into the apparent lack of due process procedures in district termination proceedings against principals, who don't enjoy union protections. "They're required under Illinois law to issue rules for these sort of pre-suspension hearings and they don't even have [such rules]," he said. "I think it shows that perhaps they haven't been pressed on the issue before."

Schmitt said that CPS attorneys haven't presented any evidence against Beyer aside from the redacted OIG report for the hearing officer to consider thus far, but that several witnesses, including parents who unenrolled their kids from Ogden due to travels outside the country, have testified in support of Beyer. The hearing will continue on December 6 and 11. After that, the Cook County Circuit Court judge handling Beyer's lawsuit will examine the hearing officer's conclusions and determine whether due process rules were actually followed. Ogden meanwhile is being overseen by acting principal Rebecca Bancroft, who's been serving as assistant principal at Back of the Yards High School and has had no prior involvement in the Ogden-Jenner merger.

Summary Report
OIG 18-00134
Subject: Michael Beyer et al.

policy" and that he "messed up." Beyer also acknowledged that he dropped the ball and did not make it clear to his staff that the practice of unenrolling students for attendance purposes is not permitted.

7. [REDACTED]

8. [REDACTED]

9. [REDACTED]

10. [REDACTED]

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A separate email thread shortly thereafter shows Beyer directing [REDACTED] to email the transfer paperwork to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] mother, noting that the students would be homeschooled during [REDACTED]. He also directed [REDACTED] teacher to "send home some work for the next two weeks." [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] mother responded "by saying they are home schooled, will I have to show any evidence of this to the state?"

c. [REDACTED]

On September 20, 2017, [REDACTED] kindergarten teacher contacted [REDACTED] to ask if [REDACTED] was unenrolled due to [REDACTED] temporary absence. [REDACTED] responded that [REDACTED] was and that [REDACTED] would be re-enrolled after returning on October 2.

d. [REDACTED]

After submitting absence forms notifying Ogden of an extended absence due to a family trip to [REDACTED] on October 11, 2017, [REDACTED] mother emailed her [REDACTED] teacher [REDACTED]. "The school called me today regarding [the absence forms]. They asked me if I'll be doing any home schooling. And considering that attendance is important in your class they would unenroll [REDACTED] and enroll [REDACTED] back when [REDACTED] comes back. That makes me somewhat nervous. [REDACTED] emailed [REDACTED] asking for guidance on how to respond; Beyer was also copied. [REDACTED] responded: "We tell parents that teachers do not give grades or assignments while they travel. Otherwise we'd make it easier for parents to not have their children at school." However, the ten day unenrollment was coded as a homeschool transfer.

e. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

On December 13, 2017, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]'s father emailed [REDACTED].

As you advised me earlier, I've met with [REDACTED] in the office yesterday and filled out forms starting the process of disenrolling [REDACTED] & [REDACTED] from Ogden starting Monday, Jan 8th (their last day in school before our trip to [REDACTED] is Dec 22nd followed by winter break).

[REDACTED] told me all I need to do to re-enroll them back in Ogden when we come back from our trip on Sat Jan 27th 2018 is to have them come back to school on Monday Jan 29th 2018 and go up to their classes before 8:30am as usual, then I go to the office to do the paper work of re-enrolling them back in Ogden. Please correct me if I misunderstood anything because it seems so simple to me than I expected [sic]...

[REDACTED] responded: "This is correct. Since [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are already students of Ogden and they are being home schooled while in [REDACTED] the process for re-enrollment is a little easier."

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The heavily redacted OIG report

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1. Documented Extended Absences

In the case of 14 students, the OIG found that Ogden learned of an upcoming extended absence through school absence forms or conversations with or emails from parents. Instead of marking these students as absent unexcused, they were unenrolled. (Some students were unenrolled and re-enrolled multiple times.) This group of students can be summarized as follows:

	Student	Date(s) Unenrolled	Date(s) Re-enrolled	Leave Code	Reason for Absence
1.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33	Annual family trip to [REDACTED]
				33	
				33	
2.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33	Annual family trip to [REDACTED]
				33	
3.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33	Observance of religious holiday and family wedding in [REDACTED]
4.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	40	Temporary absence
5.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	40	Family trip to [REDACTED]
6.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	40	Family trip to [REDACTED]
7.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	40	Family trip to [REDACTED]
8.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	40	Family trip to [REDACTED]
9.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33	Visa renewal in [REDACTED]
10.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33	Visa renewal in [REDACTED]
11.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33	Visa renewal in [REDACTED]
12.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33	Visa issues
13.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	40	Absence due to [REDACTED]
14.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	40	Absence due to [REDACTED]

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	Student	Date(s) Unenrolled	Date(s) Re-enrolled	Withdrawal Code
11.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
12.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
13.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
14.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
15.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
16.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
17.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
18.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
19.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
20.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33

The OIG also identified a smaller group of questionably timed unenrollments in the 2017-18 school year. These unenrollments are summarized in the table below:

	Student	Date(s) Unenrolled	Date(s) Re-enrolled	Withdrawal Code
1.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
2.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	40
3.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
4.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
5.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	40
6.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33
7.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	33

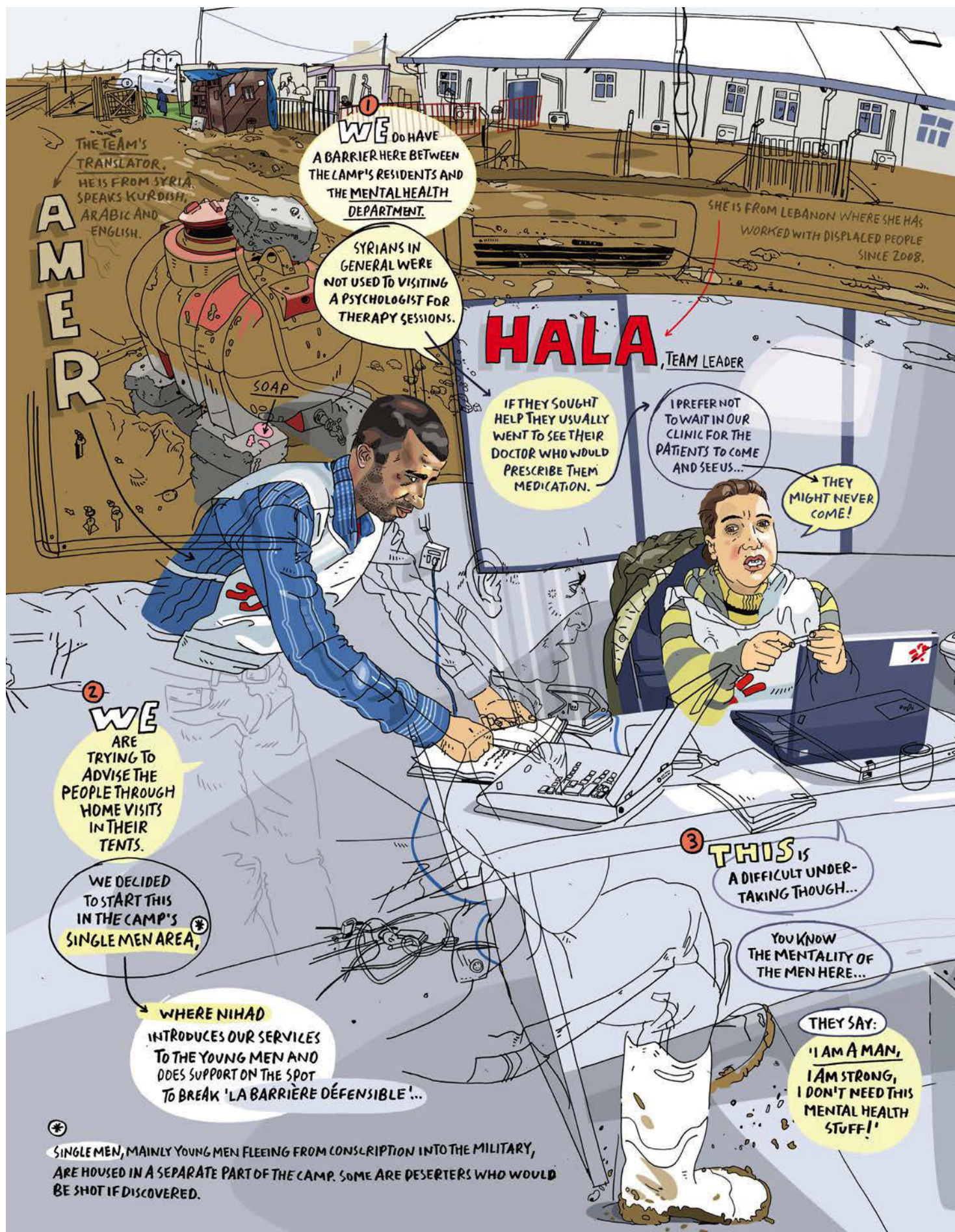
3. Review and Analysis of Ogden's Student Transfer Records

The OIG visited Ogden to obtain student transfer records related to the 75 transfers identified and discovered that the vast majority of these transfers lacked documentation. Indeed, the OIG only found transfer forms and cards for seven students in the 2016-17 school year. Looking further at the underlying documents in

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Domiz Refugee Camp, Iraqi Kurdistan

An excerpt from Olivier Kugler's Penn State University Press collection of comics reportage, *Escaping Wars and Waves: Encounters with Syrian Refugees* (2018).



THE
MENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT
OCCUPIES THREE LITTLE OFFICES
IN THE BACK OF THE BUILDING

THE MENTAL HEALTH TEAM

4 FOR WOMEN TOO,
THE IDEA OF SEEING
A PSYCHOTHERAPIST IS
SOMETHING THEY DON'T
FEEL COMFORTABLE
WITH.

WE HAD
WOMEN WHO
WERE USING THEIR
BABIES AS A COVER TO
COME HERE IN ORDER TO
GET MENTAL HEALTH
SUPPORT.

5 WITH
THE CHILDREN, THE
MAIN PROBLEMS HERE
ARE BED WETTING AND
ADHD, HYPERACTIVITY.

THE CHILDREN
ARE NERVOUS...

WHEN THEY HEAR
ANY NOISE, EVEN
IF YOU ONLY KNOCK
AT THE DOOR,
THEY CAN GET
VERY AFRAID.

THEY
TELL THEIR
COMMUNITY THAT
THERE IS A PROBLEM
WITH THE BABY AND
THAT THEY HAVE TO
GO TO THE HEALTH
CENTER.

N
I
H
A
D
PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLOR FROM SYRIA

A
H
I
N
PSYCHOLOGIST FROM SYRIA

S
U
Z
A
N
PSYCHOLOGIST
FROM IRAQI
KURDISTAN

6 THERE IS A LOT
OF DEPRESSION
AND ANXIETY...

IN SYRIA PEOPLE
USED TO BE RELATIVELY
WELL EDUCATED AND
ENJOYED A GOOD
STANDARD OF
LIVING.

THEY HAD THEIR
OWN HOMES,
CARS, ETC....

AND THEN
THEY FIND
THEMSELVES
HERE LIVING
IN TENTS.

MANY ARE
SEPARATED FROM
THEIR FAMILIES,
MANY HAVE LOST
LOVED ONES OR
THEIR PROPERTY
IN THE
CONFLICT.

SOME HAVE
SUFFERED
TRAUMATIC
EXPERIENCES.

7 ONE
MAN
TOLD ME THAT
HE HAD TO WALK
ON THE BODIES
OF DEAD
PEOPLE.

① AHIN'S SURGERY

"**MY** UNCLE USED TO BE A PSYCHOLOGIST. I ENJOYED READING HIS BOOKS AND I WANTED TO HELP MY PEOPLE. SO I DECIDED TO BECOME A PSYCHOLOGIST MYSELF."

② **WE** LEFT SYRIA 15 MONTHS AGO.

I HAVE A DEGREE IN PSYCHOLOGY ...

BUT I HAD TO GIVE UP MY MASTERS IN DAMASCUS AFTER ONE YEAR BECAUSE OF THE WAR.

④ **"MY** HUSBAND SERVED HIS MANDATORY MILITARY SERVICE BEFORE THE WAR. HE WAS WORRIED, THAT HE WOULD GET DRAFTED AGAIN. SO WE LEFT FOR QUAMISHLI OUR HOME TOWN."

③ **MY** HUSBAND AND I GOT MARRIED AFTER THE WAR STARTED.

WE USED TO LIVE IN AL KADAM, DAMASCUS.

WHEN THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY (FSA) MOVED IN THE GOVERNMENT STARTED TO BOMB OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD INDISCRIMINATELY, SO WE HAD TO MOVE TO ANOTHER NEIGHBOURHOOD CALLED AL MAZZEH.

⑤ **"THE** BUS JOURNEY FROM DAMASCUS WAS SCARY. THERE WERE MANY MILITARY CHECKPOINTS. ONE WAS EVEN MANNED BY JIHADIS. AT ONE STAGE WE COULD HEAR THE SYRIAN ARMY FIGHTING THE FSA. IT WAS VERY CLOSE ... THERE WAS A LOT OF SHOOTING. THE CHILDREN WERE CRYING. WE WERE ALL AFRAID."

AHIN'S SURGERY

KIDS CHAIRS

TOILET

"WHEN WE ARRIVED IN QUAMISHLI WE HEARD THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS ACTUALLY PLANNING TO DRAFT IN MORE SOLDIERS SO WE DECIDED TO GO TO IRAQI KURDISTAN.

"THE BORDER CROSSING WAS DIFFICULT. WE HAD TO WALK THROUGH ROUGH TERRAIN AND IT WAS PITCH DARK. THERE WERE ABOUT 50 OF US... WE WEREN'T ALLOWED TO SMOKE OR TALK."

"IF A GOVERNMENT PATROL HAD CAUGHT US WE WOULD HAVE BEEN PUT IN JAIL AND TORTURED."

"AT 3.00 A.M. WE FINALLY REACHED AN IRAQI KURDISH VILLAGE. WE KNOCKED AT THE DOOR OF A RANDOM HOUSE. FORTUNATELY THEY TOOK US IN. THE NEXT DAY WE HAD TO GO THROUGH SOME SECURITY AND IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES. WE THEN PAID A DRIVER TO TAKE US TO THE CAMP. WHERE WE SPENT THE FIRST TEN DAYS WITHOUT ELECTRICITY AND THE WATER WE WERE GIVEN WAS NOT FIT TO DRINK."

"WE DIDN'T GET ENOUGH FOOD EITHER... I GOT SICK BECAUSE OF THESE CONDITIONS. I WENT TO THE DOCTOR A WEEK AFTER WE ARRIVED AT THE CAMP AND I DISCOVERED I WAS PREGNANT. ON THE ONE HAND I WAS HAPPY BUT I ALSO FELT SAD BECAUSE I WANTED TO BE PREGNANT IN SYRIA AND NOT IN A REFUGEE CAMP."

AHIN (28)

HE IS SEVEN MONTHS OLD NOW.

THE HAPPIEST DAY OF MY LIFE WAS WHEN KAWA, MY BABY BOY, WAS BORN.

I DON'T SEE ANY FUTURE FOR US HERE. WE WOULD LOVE TO GO BACK TO QUAMISHLI WHERE MY PARENTS ARE. THEY HAVEN'T MET THEIR GRANDSON YET.

EVERY NIGHT BEFORE I PUT KAWA TO BED I HOLD HIM IN MY ARMS, TELL HIM HOW BEAUTIFUL SYRIA IS AND THAT ONE DAY WE WILL GO BACK THERE, WHERE WE WILL ALL HAVE A BEAUTIFUL LIFE.

WE LISTEN TO MUSIC WHICH REMINDS ME OF MY TIME AS A STUDENT IN DAMASCUS.

"THE FLOWERS REMIND ME OF EVERYTHING NICE AND MAKE ME FEEL OPTIMISTIC ABOUT MY FUTURE."

PLASTIC

"I LOVE WORKING WITH CHILDREN."

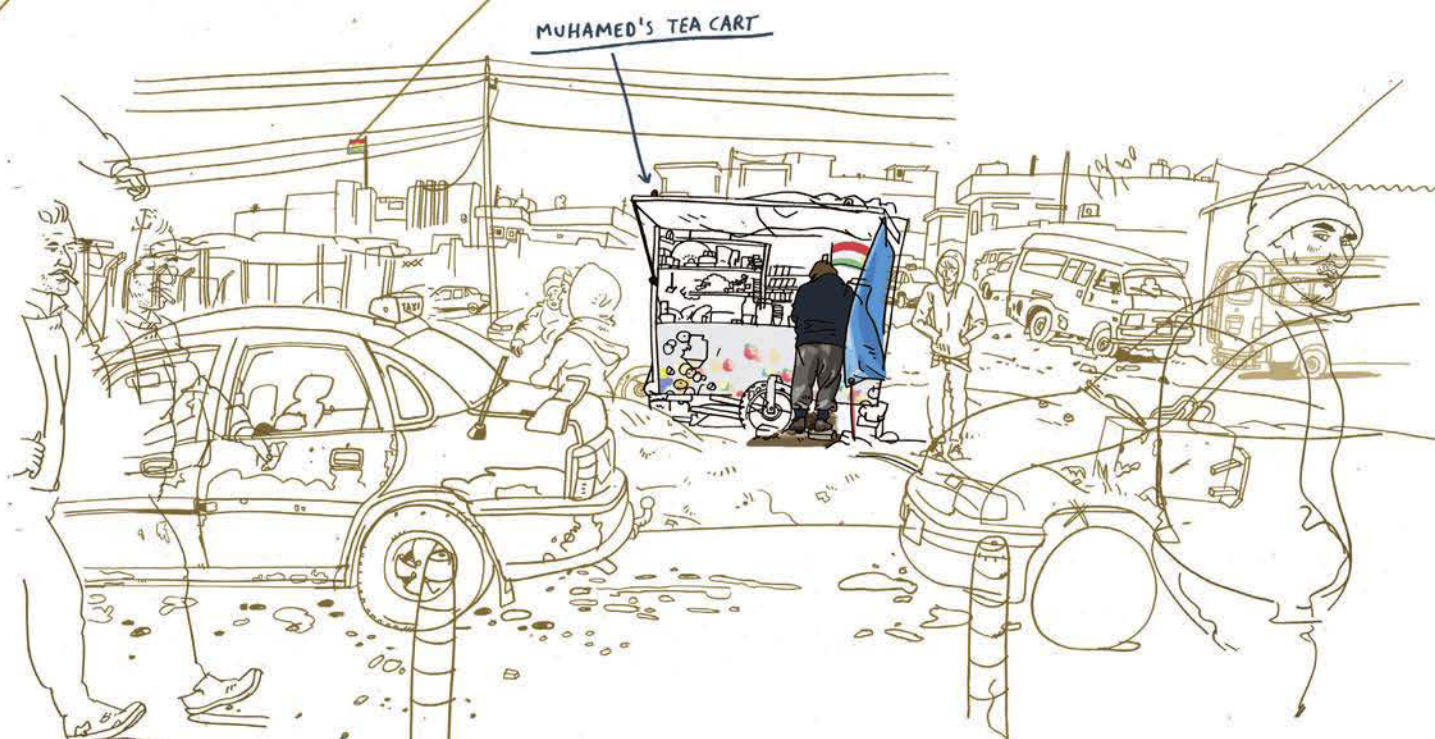
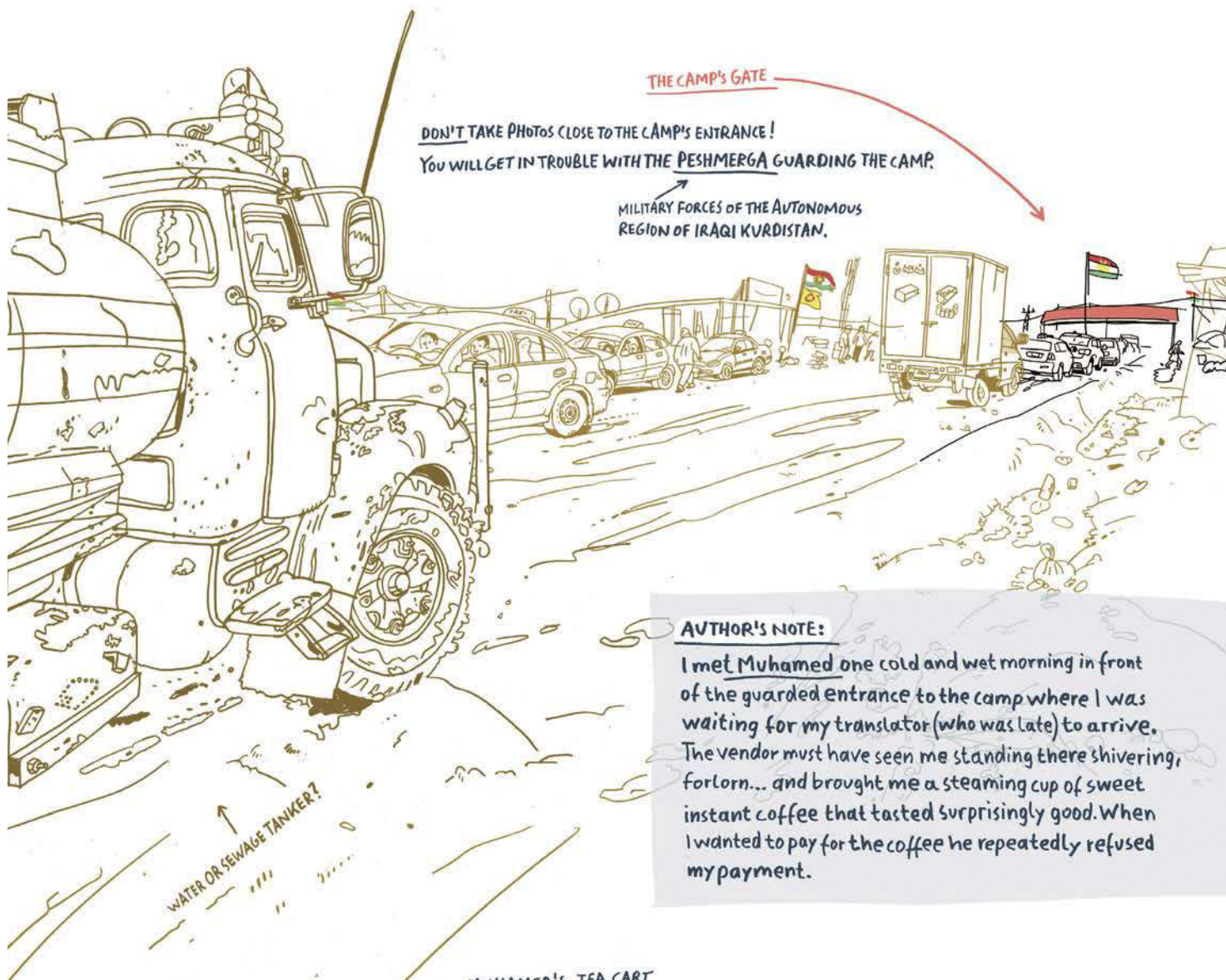
"DURING MY STUDIES I WORKED IN A CENTER FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN. I WANTED TO DO PRACTICAL TREATMENT AND HELP THE CHILDREN. IT WASN'T EASY BUT I ENJOYED IT."

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CENTER FOR SURE BUT I HAVE HEARD PEOPLE SAY THAT THE REGIME DESTROYED MOST OF THE BUILDINGS IN THE AREA AND THAT THE CENTER IS NOW BEING USED AS A MILITARY BASE."

LEGO BRICKS

COLORING BOOK

COLORING BOOK



MUHAAMED 55 YEARS OLD



"WE FLED SYRIA FIFTEEN MONTHS AGO.

WE HAD BEEN LIVING IN DAMASCUS FOR MANY YEARS. ONE AFTERNOON WE COULD HEAR A HELICOPTER APPROACHING. IT RANDOMLY STARTED BOMBING HOUSES IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD. WE RAN AWAY FROM OUR HOUSE JUST IN TIME— IT WAS HIT BY A BOMB AND DESTROYED. IT WAS NOT SAFE TO STAY... AS I'VE GOT SEVEN DAUGHTERS I WAS VERY WORRIED THAT THEY WOULD GET RAPED... WE LEFT DAMASCUS IMMEDIATELY BY BUS WITH NOTHING BUT THE CLOTHES WE'D BEEN WEARING. THE JOURNEY TO QUAMISHLI WAS SCARY AS THERE ARE MANY CHECKPOINTS. THEY ARE MANNED BY EITHER THE SYRIAN ARMY, THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY, OR JIHADIST GROUPS. BUT WE MADE IT AND WERE ABLE TO STAY FOR A WHILE WITH MY FATHER-IN-LAW'S FAMILY. BUT I HAVE A LARGE FAMILY, SO WE COULDN'T STAY WITH THEM FOR LONG. BECAUSE OF THE WAR THERE IS NO WORK IN THE AREA. FOOD, ELECTRICITY, AND FUEL ARE SCARCE AND EXPENSIVE SO WE LEFT FOR IRAQI KURDISTAN. NOW, IN THE CAMP, WE ALL LIVE IN ONE TENT. I AM HAPPY THAT WE ARE ALL TOGETHER BUT I AM NOT HAPPY WITH THE LIVING CONDITIONS HERE... THE RAIN, THE COLD... THERE IS WATER EVERYWHERE. I HAVE A BIG FAMILY TO LOOK AFTER BUT I AM OLD AND I AM SICK..."

cries when he starts talking about his wife:

MY WIFE IS NOT COPING WELL WITH ADAPTING TO OUR NEW LIVES. SHE IS VERY DEPRESSED AND THERE IS NO MEDICATION AVAILABLE.





faces of
53rd
A MONTHLY SERIES
FEATURING HYDE PARK
NOTABLES
street

THIS MONTH
Sophie Evanoff

Vanille
CHICAGO



SEE THE COMPLETE FACES OF 53RD VIDEO SERIES AT CHICAGOREADER.COM/53RDFACES

One Christmas when Detroit native Sophie Evanoff was six years old, she asked Santa for a play kitchen. She ended up getting her wish, though on Christmas morning she had to look for the kitchen outside on the deck, since her parents told her Santa couldn't fit it through the chimney. That little red and white kitchen ended up foreshadowing Sophie's career as a pastry chef and owner of Vanille Patisserie, with four locations throughout Chicago.

Sophie was the only daughter in a family with two older brothers, and she started baking with her mother from a very young age. She became known as "the girl who bakes" both at home and at school – always making the holiday dessert, bringing treats to school, helping with bake sales, and turning every school project into an opportunity to create something fun – like a cake that looked like a glacier for her 7th grade geography assignment.

She got her first Kitchen Aid stand mixer as a Christmas gift from her father when she was 16 – she remembers feeling so cool, and thinking this had to be the first step in her career as a professional baker. Sophie planned to go to Europe for pastry school once she graduated high school, but her parents convinced her to take a more "practical" path, and she got her undergraduate degree in psychology from University of Michigan. She never gave up her early dream, though, and after graduation she moved to Chicago to attend The French Pastry School. The six-month, intensive program focused on all aspects of pastry – bread, cake, French entremets, confec-

tions, and ice cream – and she was finally doing what she loved to do.

Her first job out of pastry school was at a chocolate manufacturer in Glenview, and she was thrilled to be making more than minimum wage. Every work day she took the train to the suburbs, walked a mile to the factory, and then would come home at the end of the day exhausted and covered in chocolate. Sophie worked on the chocolate enrobing line, just like in the famous episode of "I Love Lucy," but soon the job became more about fixing the very temperamental chocolate machinery and less about being creative, and she needed to find something else. Her next job at a wedding cake bakery and online truffle company gave her the chance to put her pastry skills to work.

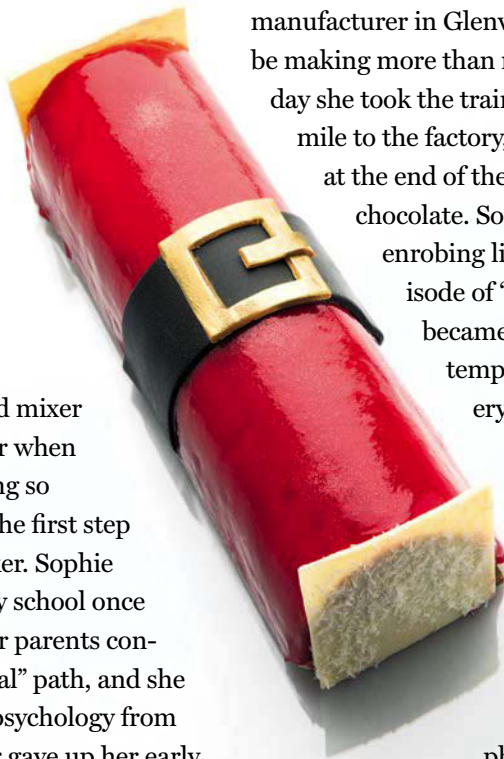
In November 2011, Sophie had a chance to purchase Vanille Patisserie, then with just two stores in Lincoln Park and the Chicago French Market. The business had a great reputation for quality, and just needed a little tweaking and a strategic plan

to move forward – since then Sophie has opened two more locations in Lakeview and Hyde Park and Vanille is thriving.

Right now is one of Vanille's busiest times of the year, with holiday orders already coming in for both traditional and modern Buche de Noel cakes; holiday cookie trays; macarons; petit fours; and the special Galette des Rois, available for only one month – from Christmas Eve through the end of January. This year Vanille has partnered with the non-profit, Gateway to Learning in Logan Square, and they will be purchasing some of the organization's cookies to include on the holiday cookie trays.

Vanille's Hyde Park location is celebrating its first anniversary this December, and Sophie is looking forward to energy in the store that comes when people are picking up their holiday desserts. She says, "Desserts are a part of every special occasion, and we get to go home with our customers and be a part of holidays, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, and baby showers. We are creating pastries but that's not all we're doing – we want to be a part of your family."

5229 S. Harper Court
773-868-4574
vanillepatisserie.com



RESTAURANT REVIEW

Rocio Vargas's cannabis catering company helps the medicine go down

With the Planda Group the chef can throw a party, and teach the ailing to cook

By **MIKE SULA**



Rocio Vargas
SARAH JOYCE

In 2012 Rocio Vargas had a vigorous marijuana plant growing in her closet, and three more in her West Lawn backyard. Thanks to the advice of an arborist friend, she and her boyfriend were growing more weed than they could smoke.

At the time she was a recent culinary school graduate working as a line cook at Park Hyatt in Oak Brook, where she'd cooked for the likes of Will Smith, Betty White, and the Blackhawks. So she decided to put her skills to work on the surplus.

"There was a lot of trial and error and a lot of wasted weed," she says. She experimented with the classic pot brownie at first, overcooking the cannabis in one batch, burning another when she'd fallen asleep and left it in the oven. But over the years, through online research

and consultations with chefs in California, where cannabis cuisine was in a renaissance, she began to get the hang of it, infusing foods with more predictably dosed batches of canabutta, canna-oil, and concentrates like hash oil and Rick Simpson Oil. She even found a way to infuse duck fat and foie gras paté.

Four years later she'd worked her way up to sous chef at the late Charlatan in West Town when her father, who was suffering from congestive heart failure and lung cancer, took a turn for the worse, dropping a couple hundred pounds in the span of a year. Vargas hinted to him that cannabis could provide some relief from the ravages of chemotherapy, but he usually demurred. By the time he started coming around to the idea it was too late.

Against doctor's orders he flew to Mexico

to his late mother's farm in San Luis Potosí. Vargas followed. "When he passed away I took a step back from my career," she says. "I didn't want to talk to anybody. I didn't want to deal with anybody." She spent a month on the farm reflecting on her life and work, and it seemed like a sign when she discovered her grandmother's marijuana plants still growing on the property. Her grandmother wasn't a smoker. Like many in the area who practiced traditional medicine, she infused the flowers into alcohol to make a topical painkiller. "That's when I decided to merge both worlds," says Vargas.

Back in Chicago the restaurant grind was offering its own encouragement. When the Charlatan closed she took a line cook job at the Duck Inn. She was already at her wit's end one particularly shitty night when a chef got in her

face and blew his top. (It wasn't owner Kevin Hickey, she says. "I love that guy.")

"I looked down at my cutting board and told myself 'fuck this.'" She walked out in the middle of service and hasn't worked in a restaurant kitchen since. That's when she started Canna Chicago, a cannabis catering company, specializing in pop-ups and private consultations with medical marijuana patients. She threw her first dinner last February in a rented apartment overlooking Milwaukee, Damen, and North in Wicker Park, serving some 25 guests coconut chicken injected with cannabutter, and charcuterie with carrots and cauliflower pickled with vinegar flavored with cinnamon, chile de arbol, and cannabis-infused sugar. She's done 17 events since then, most recently a "Friendsgiving," for which



FOOD & DRINK



Pappardelle & Puffs. Paired with “Marta” joint. Pappardelle, shiitake, butternut squash, caramelized cippolini, brown butter, shaved pecorino, flower. PETER NOON

she prepared turkey, stuffing, macaroni and cheese, and roasted acorn squash with chimichurri, all spiked with cannabidiol, aka CBD, the non-psychoactive cannabinoid known for its antianxiety and anti-inflammatory properties (among many others).

After an invitation to do a dinner in LA last April, Vargas started thinking beyond Chicago and changed the name of her company to Planda—Gaelic for “plant.” One of her first events after the change was a collaboration with Passion House coffee roaster Colin Frew called Beans + Greens, a tasting of three infused coffee varietals, paired with Vargas’ uninfused dishes created to complement the profiles of the coffee, as well as the strains they’re paired with. Course one was an Ethiopian Yirgacheffe spiked with terpenes, or essential oils, extracted from the sweet, tart Super Lemon Haze strain, and served with a radicchio-burrata-almond salad dressed with a citrus vinaigrette. Next came a Costa Rican pour over with a joint, and a mushroom-nutmeg ricotta flatbread.

Vargas’s dedication to helping people didn’t extend only to her father, and she’s become sought after for speaking engagements. Last month she spoke to a group of cancer patients at Gilda’s Club, where she explained how to decarboxylate. That’s the process of heating marijuana to activate cannabinoids like tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and CBD. You won’t get much from your infused olive oil unless you do that first. She went on to explain microdosing, eating small amounts of infused foods

to gauge your tolerance and how much you need to relieve your symptoms. And she explained how to wash raw cannabis to diminish its muddy flavor. Her presentation ended with her sautéing mushrooms and quinoa in olive oil (unmedicated this time, to keep within legal boundaries).

Vargas currently has four private clients she’s teaching how to use their medicine. Her current challenge is creating cannabis suppositories for a woman suffering from MS, arthritis, and breast cancer.

As Illinois moves inexorably toward passing recreational marijuana legislation, chefs like Vargas and Manny Mendoza are increasingly operating above ground. On December 1 Vargas is hosting a five-course dinner (orzo and spinach salad with Blue Cheese terpenes, grilled octopus paired with a Cherry Punch joint, CBD kombucha, s’mores cheesecake with Rick Simpson Oil caramel sauce), followed the next day by a three-course coffee pairing, both at a location to be announced. She sells tickets through her website, <https://www.planda.co/>.

Eventually Vargas wants to open a permanent space “for people that were arrested because of this plant or have had doors closed to them due to a criminal background. Ultimately teaching speaks to me. If I can ever teach classes in infusion or cooking I want to build a whole army of chefs that know how to work with cannabis.”

@MikeSula

ARTS & CULTURE

READER RECOMMENDED

ALL AGES

FREE



Q Brothers Christmas Carol LIZ LAUREN

THEATER

Christmas trains, elves, bingo, showgirls, and many, many carols

Here are 19 shows to get you into the holiday spirit.

By JULIA CLAUSEN

Christmas would not be complete without **THE NUTCRACKER**. The Joffrey Ballet’s production choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon tells a magical story of love and family and the 1893 World’s Fair. Or, try the House Theater of Chicago’s alternative: an inspiring, ballet-free rendition.

THE NUTCRACKER 12/1-12/30: Thu-Fri 7 PM, Sat-Sun 2 and 7 PM; also Wed 12/19, 7 PM; Wed 12/26, 2 PM; Fri 12/21 and 12/28, 2 PM; and Mon 12/24, 2 PM; no performance Sun 12/2, 7 PM, Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Ida B. Wells, 312-386-8905, joffrey.org, \$35-\$179.

THE NUTCRACKER Through 12/30: Thu-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat-Sun 3 and 7:30 PM, Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division, 773-769-3832, thehousetheatre.com, \$20-\$50.

CHICAGO! show starting December 14 and **HANDEL MESSIAH** on December 20-23, and the American Blues Theater is performing its live 1940’s radio broadcast of **IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE**.

“MERRY, MERRY CHICAGO!” 12/14-12/23, dates and times vary; see website, and **HANDEL MESSIAH** 12/19-12/23, times vary; see website, Symphony Center, 220 S. Michigan, 312-294-3000, cso.org, \$41-\$155.

IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE: LIVE IN CHICAGO! Through 1/5/19: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 4:30 and 7:30 PM, Sun 2:30 PM; also Thu 11/29, 2:30 PM, and Mon 12/31, 7:30 PM; no performances Thu 11/23, 7:30 PM, and 1/5 7:30 PM, Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont, 773-654-3103, americanbluestheater.com, \$19-\$59.

Looking for something more traditional? The Chicago Symphony Orchestra will be playing its annual **“MERRY, MERRY CHI-**

There are six productions of **A CHRISTMAS CAROL** this year. Goodman Theater’s annual performance (with Larry Yando back

The Santaland Diaries

BY DAVID SEDARIS

ADAPTED BY
JOE MANTELLO

DIRECTED BY
STEVE SCOTT

Strapped for cash at holiday time, an actor takes a job as "Crumpet the Elf" at Macy's Santaland. Brimming "with Sedaris' wicked humor" (*Chicago* magazine), this delightfully irreverent play is perfect for those who like their eggnog spiked.

NOVEMBER 30 – DECEMBER 30
FOR MATURE ELVES ONLY

312.443.3800
GoodmanTheatre.org

GROUPS OF 10+ ONLY: 312.443.3820

THEATRE
GOODMAN

ARTS & CULTURE

continued from 17

as Scrooge) offers a heartwarming musical evening for the whole family. Chicago Shakespeare Theater is bringing back its hip-hop **Q BROTHERS CHRISTMAS CAROL**, and E.D.G.E. of Orion Theatre presents **A KLINGON CHRISTMAS CAROL**, performed entirely in Klingon.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL Through 12/30: Wed-Thu 7:30 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 2 and 8 PM, Sun 2 and 6:30 PM; also Wed 12/19 and 12/26, 2 PM; Thu 12/20 and 12/27, 2 PM; and Mon 12/24, 2 PM, Goodman Theatre, 170 N. Dearborn, 312-443-3800, goodmantheatre.org, \$40-\$130.

Q BROTHERS CHRISTMAS CAROL Through 12/30, Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 6 and 8:30 PM, Sun 3 PM; also Sun 12/23 and 12/30, 6 PM, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, 800 E. Grand, 312-595-5600, chicagoshakes.com, \$30-\$52.

A KLINGON CHRISTMAS CAROL Through 12/16: Thu-Fri 8 PM, Sat-Sun 3 and 8 PM; no performances Sat 12/1, 3 PM, Edge Theater, 5451 N. Broadway, 773-387-9237, edgeoforion.com, \$22.

For a uniquely Chicago theater experience, visit **EL STORIES: HOLIDAY TRAIN** by Waltzing Mechanics, a dramatized train ride based on real commuters, or join Neo-Futurists and the Ruffians for **BURNING BLUEBEARD** and imagine what might happen if the performers killed in the 1903 Iroquois Theater fire came back to life and tried to recreate their old show.

EL STORIES: HOLIDAY TRAIN 11/30-12/22: Thu-Fri 8 PM, Sat 3 and 8 PM, Sun 3 PM, Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln, 773-404-7336, waltzingmechanics.org, \$25.

BURNING BLUEBEARD 12/26-12/31: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 3 and 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, Mon 7 PM, Neo-Futurist Theater, 5153 N. Ashland, 773-878-4557, neofuturists.org, \$25-\$35.

Looking for a good laugh? Annoyance Theater has several holiday performances, including **It's CHRISTMAS, GODDAMNIT!**, a macabre holiday comedy in which a family gathering turns from dysfunctional to deadly. Vicki Quade returns for **CHRISTMAS BINGO: IT'S A HO-HO-HOLY NIGHT**, part one-woman comedy show, part bingo night, full of trivia and family-friendly laughs.

It's CHRISTMAS, GODDAMNIT! Through 12/28: Fri 8 PM, the Annoyance Theatre, 851 W. Belmont, 773-697-9693, theannoyance.com, \$20, \$18 students.

CHRISTMAS BINGO: IT'S A HO-HO-HOLY NIGHT 11/30-12/30: Fri-Sat 8 PM, Sun 2 PM, Royal George Theatre, 1641 N. Halsted, 312-988-9000, ticketmaster.com, \$30.

The world premiere of **SNOWGIRLS: THE MUSICAL**, by Hell In A Handbag Productions, tells the story of a young reindeer who wants to be a pole dancer, and reveals what really goes on at the North Pole. Through 12/30: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, Mary's Attic, 5400 N. Clark, 312-409-4357, handbagproductions.org, \$27-\$120, \$20 students and seniors.

BARNEY THE ELF by Pride Films and Plays is an LGBTQ-themed musical about an elf who must find a new home after Santa retires. 12/14-1/6/19: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 3:30 and 7:30 PM, Sun 3:30 PM, Pride Art Center, 4139 N. Broadway, 773-857-0222, pridefilmsandplays.com, \$15.

New this year from Silk Road Rising, **CHRISTMAS MUBARAK** tells the story of Jesus from both Quranic and New Testament perspectives. Strawdog Theatre has adapted the playful and spooky children's book **HERSHEL AND THE HANUKKAH GOBLINS** into a musical. **CHRISTMAS MUBARAK** 11/30-12/11: Fri 8 PM, Sat-Sun 2 PM, Mon-Tue 7:30 PM, Silk Road Rising, 77 W. Washington, 312-857-1234, silkroadrising.org, \$38, \$21.50 students.

HERSHEL AND THE HANUKKAH GOBLINS 12/1-1/5/19: Sat-Sun 11 AM and 1 PM, Strawdog Theatre Company, 1802 W. Berenice, 773-644-1380, strawdog.org, \$25, \$20 kids.

On the hunt for family-friendly fun? **BEATRIX POTTER HOLIDAY TEA PARTY** by Chicago Children's Theatre invites children to drink hot cocoa and enjoy a puppet show. There will be two sensory-friendly performances on December 23. Other children's classics include **THE STEADFAST TIN SOLDIER: A CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME**, based on the Hans Christian Andersen story, at Lookingglass Theatre Company, and **MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET: THE MUSICAL** at Theater at the Center.

BEATRIX POTTER HOLIDAY TEA PARTY 12/8-12/24: Sat-Sun 11:30 AM and 2 PM; also Mon 12/24 9:30 and 11:30 AM, The Station, 100 S. Racine, 773-227-0180, chicagochildrenstheater.org, \$52.

THE STEADFAST TIN SOLDIER: A CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME Through 1/13/19: Wed 7:30 PM, Thu 2 and 7:30 PM, Fri 7:30 PM, Sat-Sun 2 and 7:30 PM, Tue 7:30 PM; no performances 11/22 or 12/25, Lookingglass Theatre Company, 821 N. Michigan, 312-337-0665, lookingglasstheatre.org, \$60-\$85.

MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET: THE MUSICAL Through 12/23: dates and times vary; see website, Theater at the Center, 1040 Ridge Rd., Munster, Indiana, 219-836-3255, theateratthecenter.com, \$42-\$46, \$20 students. 



HeLa
 JONATHAN L. GREEN

THEATER

Hunger games

Arcadia pulls its audience into various emotional and historical puzzles.

Tom Stoppard's 1993 masterpiece, set in two different eras although in the same drawing room in Sidley Park, an English country estate, displays the playwright's usual polymathic love of diverse subjects. These include the second law of thermodynamics, Lord Byron, and landscape gardening, for starters. But *Arcadia* also serves as a love letter to hunger—for love itself, for fame, and above all, for knowledge. As one character declares, "It's wanting to know that makes us matter."

Ted Hoerl's admirable staging for Promethean Theatre Ensemble hones in on that free-range hunger like a dog in a bone shop, playing up both the intensity and absurdity of the moment-to-moment lives of the characters as they chase after answers.

In the 1809 era, mathematics prodigy Thomasi-na Coverly (Meghann Tabor) struggles with the term "carnal embrace," while her tutor, Septimus Hodge (Chris Woolsey), fends off the consequences of various dalliances. In the modern era, preening Byron scholar Bernard Nightingale (Scot West) chases his theory of a deadly duel fought by Byron at the estate, while fellow academic Hannah Jarvis (Cameron Feagin) digs into the identity of a mysterious 19th-century hermit who lived on the estate grounds.

There are a few stretches where the intellectual back-and-forth gets more weighty than heady. But Hoerl and his company mostly know when to go for the verbal kill shot and when to allow quieter moments to resonate, allowing the audience to put together the pieces of the emotional and historic puzzles that the characters are missing. —**KERRY REID** *ARCADIA* Through 12/16: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3 PM; also Mon 12/3, 8 PM, Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln, 773-404-7336, prometheantheatre.org, \$36, \$28 seniors, \$18 students, \$15 military.

A tale as old as time

Drury Lane's *Beauty and the Beast* revival is showing its age.

The Disney folks are brilliant at repackaging. Hence a hit 1991 animated musical feature, with songs by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman, about a bookish young woman who saves an enchanted prince by falling in love with him, has become an array of action figures, a line of clothing and costumes, countless fashion accessories, a 1994 live version for Broadway (with additional songs by Menken and Tim Rice), a "junior" version for high school and middle school productions, a 2017 live-action movie

starring *Harry Potter* alum Emma Watson, and so on.

The current revival of the Broadway version at Drury Lane Theatre, directed by Alan Souza, tries mightily to transcend mere repetition of the familiar Disney schtick while also aiming to please audiences eager for more of the same old, same old. The result is a show that won't fully satisfy anyone.

Ryan Park's costumes evoke the look of the movies (and copycat stage versions) without slavishly recreating them. His costumes for human clock Cogsworth and pal Lumiere, the talking candelabra, are particularly inventive. But those he designed for Belle look drab, and the one for the Beast is beastly without looking beast-like.

It doesn't help that Erica Stephan and Brandon Contreras lack any chemistry as Belle and the Beast. I doubt audiences would notice their costumes if they really believed the two were falling in love. The only believable couple in the show is Nick Cosgrove's too tightly wound Cogsworth and Tony Carter's adorably flirtatious Lumiere. Every time they stepped on stage, I found myself wishing I was at a new, as yet unwritten musical, centered on these two. —**JACK HELBIG** *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* Through 1/27/19: Wed 8 PM, Thu 1:30 and 8 PM, Fri 8 PM, Sat 5 and 8:30 PM, Sun 2 and 6 PM; also Wed 11/28 and 12/5, 1:30 PM; no performances Thu 12/6, 1:30 PM, or Fri 12/7, Drury Lane Theatre, 100 Drury Ln., Oakbrook Terrace, 630-530-0111, drurylanetheater.com, \$60-\$75, \$77-\$115 with meal.

Reach out, touch faith

***Book of Mormon* is still crass and juvenile—and completely delightful.**

Sure, laugh at the Mormons and their crazy creation myths all you want—but are they really any nuttier than stories of, say, a virgin getting pregnant and delivering a deity? *The Book of Mormon*, the 2011 Tony-winning musical now making a brief pitstop at the Oriental Theatre, has always worn its affection for the mysterious workings of faith on its short white shirtsleeves. Creators Trey Parker, Robert Lopez, and Matt Stone also clearly love and understand the conventions of musical theater. (Parker and Stone showed that back in 1999 with *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut*.)

Book of Mormon is crass and juvenile, but also mostly smart about its targets, which include colonialism in both theater and the larger world. ("Hasa Diga Eebowai"—allegedly translated as "Fuck you, God"—remains the best send-up of "Hakuna Matata" imaginable.) The show also offers a reminder of why believing in something, whether friendship or faith, matters when you're facing a sea of troubles (AIDS, warlords, maggots in your scrotum).

As golden-boy missionary Elder Price, Kevin Clay nails the blend of self-absorption and self-doubt driv-

ing the character's travails in Uganda. Conner Peirson seems to be channeling the late Stephen Furst's Flounder in *Animal House* to delightful effect as side-kick-turned-theological-star Elder Cunningham. Kayla Pecchioni stands out as Nabulungi, the young Ugandan woman who seeks answers from Elder Cunningham's pop-culture spin on Mormonism. The sound in the ensemble numbers is a bit muddy, but the message here is still clear—and surprisingly appropriate for the season. —**KERRY REID** *THE BOOK OF MORMON* Through 12/2: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 2 and 8 PM, Sun 2 and 7:30 PM, Oriental Theatre, 24 W. Randolph, 800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com, \$40-\$150.

An immortal life

***HeLa* turns the story of Henrietta Lacks into a key to the universe.**

Sideshow Theatre Company presents the world premiere of J. Nicole Brooks's transcendent new play that takes the amazing and horrifying true story of Henrietta Lacks as its launch point but goes far beyond the stars and back. Lacks—the African-American woman from Baltimore whose seemingly immortal and ever-multiplying cancerous tumors were used by medical scientists to study untold maladies—was an unknown historical figure until Rebecca Skloot's best-selling 2010 book. But Brooks's play isn't a biography and Lacks's tale is only one of many stories that inform her heartfelt examination of race, medicine, and basic humanity in America.

A little girl on the west side of Chicago in the 80s dreams of exploring outer space while missing her late mother. An African-American mother of five in segregated early-50s Baltimore checks into a hospital complaining of cervical pain. Meanwhile, in an undetermined but distant future, celestial beings muse about their time on Earth and the grand cosmic meaning of it all. In less capable hands this material could've come off as preachy, sentimental, or just incoherent, but Brooks ties it all together like a master weaver.

The uniformly excellent cast, most juggling multiple roles, are each given moments to shine, but eight-year-old Ayah Sol Masai Hall as the unnamed little girl is the burning star around which this particular galaxy revolves. Brooks has written what will undoubtedly be a play that will be performed countless times in the future. I felt fortunate to witness it so soon after its inception. If you don't feel something after seeing it, check your pulse. —**DMITRY SAMAROV** *HELA* Through 12/23: Thu-

ARTS & CULTURE

Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 2:30 PM, Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln, 773-404-7336, sideshowtheatre.org, \$23, \$18 students, seniors, and industry.

Scroog'd

***Q Brothers Christmas Carol* serves up an old chestnut with a side of sass.**

Lay aside all previous notions of *A Christmas Carol*, as the Q Brothers serve up this chestnut with sauce that goes from sappy to sassy in three and a half seconds. You know the story: tightwad Ebenezer Scrooge gets served by three spirits on Christmas Eve, and his scrupulous adherence to the worst principles of capitalism fall like scales from his benighted eyes. Though money is deemed trivial in the schemes of family, friendship, and love, it also comes out a bit of a hero: a fat tip for a frisky fellow, a turkey leg for Tiny Tim. Add in the hip-hop theater artists the Q Brothers, who, with a crew of game and gallant mates, retell the old favorite with so much wit and such fun beats that you might forget the story has a moral. The genius of their work is a killer combination of in-depth literary investigation, multifarious musical skills, serious acting chops, and the zest for invention that forms the essence of theater—even at Chicago Shakespeare's The Yard, the production retains the scrappy edge of store-bought holiday lights and dollar beauty wigs (it is also inclusive: menorahs top the wreathed pillars).

The Q Brothers Collective—GQ, JQ, Jackson Doran, and Postell Pringle, joined by John Hoogenakker as Scrooge (Jason Grimm takes over the role December 12) and DJ Kieran Pereira—are chameleons who toss on personae like ermines and strip them off again like Vegas professionals. Highlights include Pringle's strobe light turn as both Bob and Martha Cratchit and JQ as everyone, especially a gymnastically gifted Lil' Tim. —**IRENE HSIAO** *Q BROTHERS CHRISTMAS CAROL* Through 12/30, Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 6 and 8:30 PM, Sun 3 PM; also Sun 12/23 and 12/30, 6 PM, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, 800 E. Grand, 312-595-5600, chicagoshakes.com, \$30-\$52.

Pole dancer

***SnowGirls* puts the X back in Xmas.**

The winter holidays invariably unleash a blizzard of Christmas-themed productions that range from the sentimental to the satiric. Hell in a Handbag Productions' new show *SnowGirls* fits in the latter camp—and I

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VISUAL ART

Final frontier

"Chicago New Media 1973-1992" pays tribute to the city's contribution to video games and digital art.

By CAROLINE PICARD

Chicago isn't immediately associated with technology's vanguard in the popular imagination. But Gallery 400's current exhibition, "Chicago New Media 1973-1992," focuses on the city's contribution to new media history through a broad installation of video games, digital art, video art, and archival materials. The oldest photograph is a 1910 still from Uptown's Essanay Studios showing a cast of cowboys with horses posed beneath the elaborate (and heavy looking) electric studio lights. Not only is this image evidence of how, as curator Jon Cates puts it, Chicago was "an early contender" for the film industry, it shows a direct correlation between representations of the iconic west and the technology that produced it.

With assistance from Chaz Evans, Jonathan Kinkley and the Video Game Art (VGA) Gallery, Cates highlights the way "new media"—video art, video games, and electronic music—evolved through a radical community of Chicago-based early adopters in the early 70s. "This creative culture of collaborative communities gathered together regularly to perform in various configurations publicly during annual Electronic Visualization Events on the campus of the University of Illinois at Chicago," he says. "Their connections were social, artistic, educational, and technological." The exhibition shows how people like Dan Sandin, Phil Morton, Tom DeFanti, Ted Nelson, Jamie Faye Fenton, and others connected commercial gaming, academic research, and independent art making in a way that permanently impacted the industry. These figures, Cates says, "fostered ethical commitments through new kinds of art, novel in their form and content."

Upon entering the show, the first thing you

see are two free-standing, free-to-play arcade-style video games, *Mortal Kombat* (1992) and *Defender* (1981), both made by Chicago-based companies Midway Games and Williams Electronics Inc. (now called WMS Games and based out of Nevada). Behind these, a looping program of more than 20 films from 1973 to 2007 by Sandin, DeFanti, Morton, Annette Barbier and Richard Mandeberg, Nancy Bechtol, and more is projected on the wall. These videos are all culled from the Video Data Bank archive—a local library of videos and media art that Morton began in the 70s, collecting video made by artists experimenting with then-new video tools. As Cates puts it, the films in view collapse "distinctions between what is artwork, documentation, or tutorial."

While many technological systems present in the show were originally spearheaded by the combined effort of university and military resources—the Internet, for example, began as a government initiative developed

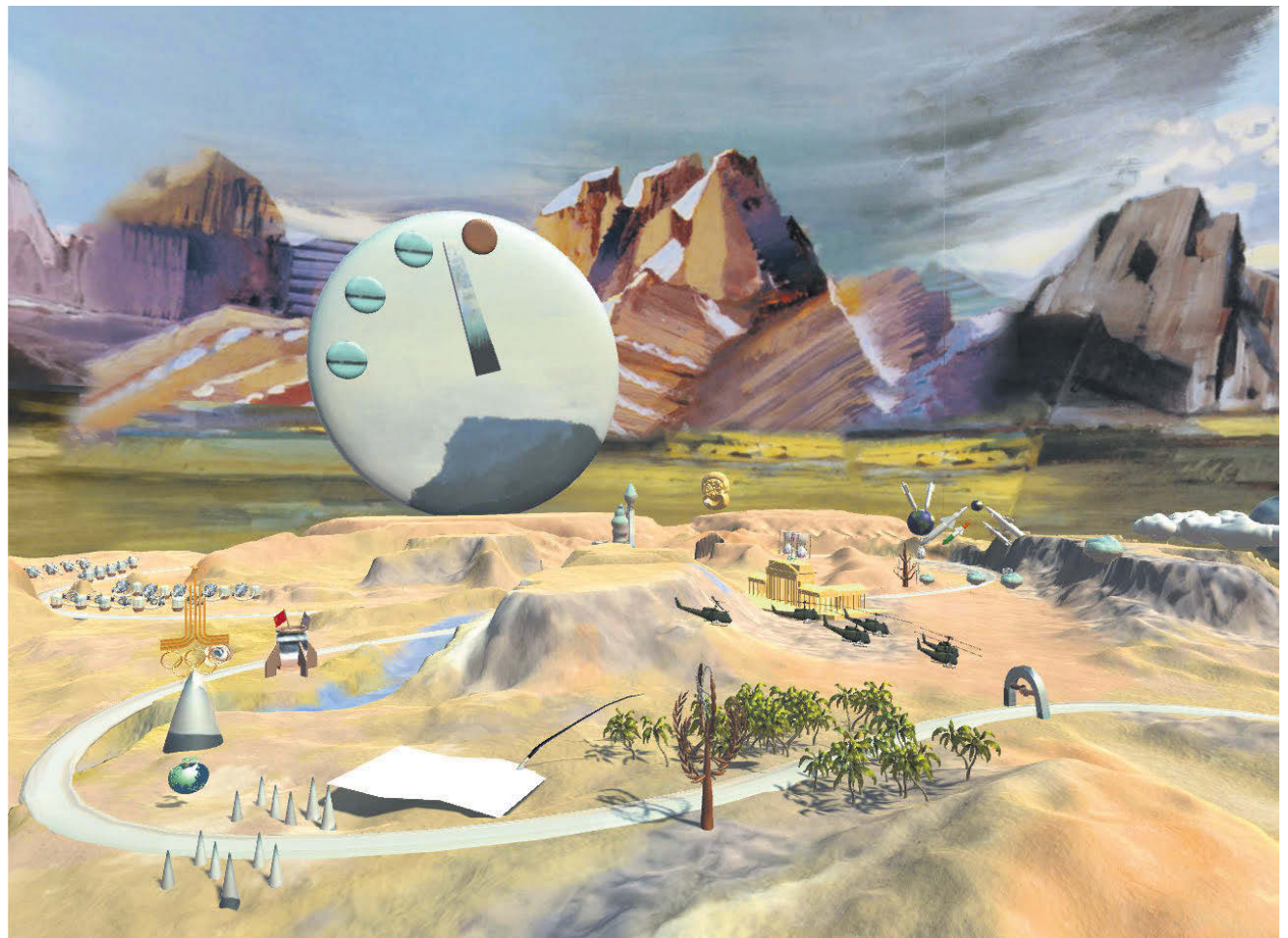
by universities to decentralize information exchanges during the Cold War—young people used the same innovations for their own artistic and ethical experimentation, an option that coincided with the development of more personal technology. Tools like the video camcorder, the personal computer, and reel-to-reel recording devices created new possibilities for self-expression. "A radical turn toward unprecedented opportunities for change provided new pathways for expanding consciousness and collective will through the creation of new genres, voices, and visions of art," Cates says.

Most of these innovations have become so integrated in our daily lives, it's difficult to remember that they are not only recent but also shaped, at least partly, by Chicagoans. Cates and his partners have created a compelling installation with almost 100 contributing artists, scientists, developers, and public program participants. The resulting showcase

of once-innovative equipment, archival materials, school curricula, interactive timelines, and video games not only captures the energy of play but also the processes by which we see ourselves today.

To the left of the gallery entrance is *Forest* (1991), a virtual forest that viewers can only visit through a VR headset, by Ellen Sandor and (art)n: Stephan Meyers, Janine Fron, and Craig Ahmer. Jane Veeder's *Montana* (1982) loops nearby on a flat-screen TV. The deceptively simple three-minute animation features crude cartoon forms of an eagle and mountains. Similarly illustrated buildings and a pair of opposing camcorders slowly encroach upon the tableau until text pops up: "Good luck electronically visualizing your futures!" Given that a current strategy for addressing climate change today is technological innovation, this work seems particularly prescient.

Flickering through the entire gallery is a massive bull's-eye projection by Jason



Have a Nice Day II: VR Tour Through the Decades, Ellen Sandor, Chris Kemp, Diana Torres, and Azadeh Gholizadeh, (art)n, virtual reality installation with Unity and Oculus Rift, 2017. COURTESY OF ELLEN SANDOR AND VGA GALLERY

Salavon. *Everything, All at Once (Part III)* (2005) uses custom design software to convert a live television broadcast into what the artist describes as “a circle of concentric stripes of color,” which changes according to the average colors of its affiliated program. During my visit, the circle was mauve, purple, white, and gray, and a small low-to-the-ground television flitted between the *Ellen Degeneres Show* and a news report of the Camp Fire in Butte County, California. Although this juxtaposition was coincidental, the effect combined with other works and materials, like that original 1910 photograph, to suggest how representations of American landscapes are and have always been fully enmeshed with technology, whether because 19th century painters went out on surveying trips to map the country’s geologic features or because their sublime pictures wouldn’t have been believable without photographic evidence. Further echoes of this theme occur later in the show with Siebren Versteeg’s post-9/11 work *Emergency* (2002). Played on a flat-screen television, this video features the tops of summer trees and sky while a simultaneous program produces sounds of emergency vehicles.

The American fantasy of the frontier arguably influenced these new media pioneers to the extent that they insisted upon free information, experimentation, and self-expression. Perhaps what is also American is the refusal to accept traditional hierarchies that would otherwise distinguish high art (painting, for instance) from consumerist culture (video games or—back in the day—photography)—a refusal Cates marks through his deliberate juxtaposition of video games, artist-made video games, art videos, and technological tools. While “Chicago New Media 1973-1992” is the first exhibition to link Chicago’s new media community to companies like Bally, Midway, and Williams, academic institutions, and ad hoc art communities, Cates, (who also teaches at SAIC) shows how “an early ethos of playfulness, interactivity and sharing” grew and expanded. This 1970s Chicago Media Arts character, he argues, “becomes massively and widely available starting in the 1990s with a lasting impact from then on up to and including today.”

@cocolarolo

BOOK SWAP

Lit recs for the reader exhausted by the weight of history

In Book Swap, a regular feature that is entirely unique, about books, and not at all related to the music feature In Rotation, a *Reader* staffer recommends two to five books and then asks a local wordsmith, literary enthusiast, or publishing-adjacent professional to do the same. It is awesome. Way better than it would be if it were about records.

In this installment, culture editor **AIMEE LEVITT** swaps book suggestions with **SARAH HOLLENBECK**, co-owner of Women & Children First bookstore in Andersonville and an essayist and live lit performer.

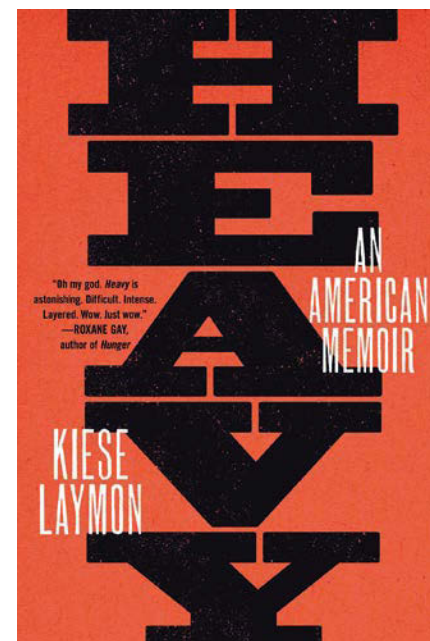
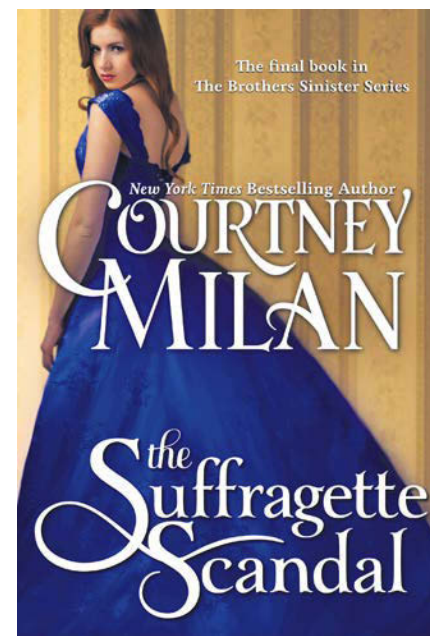
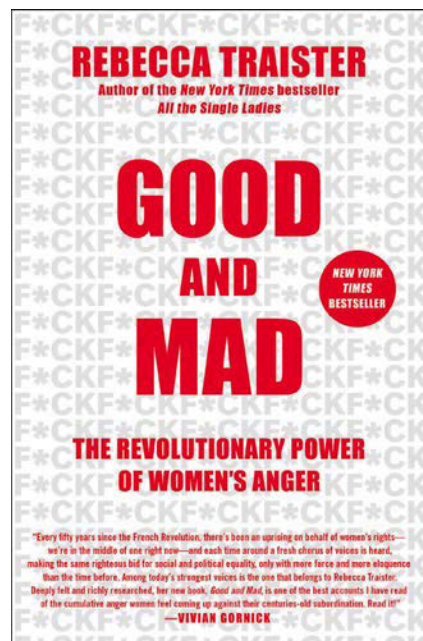
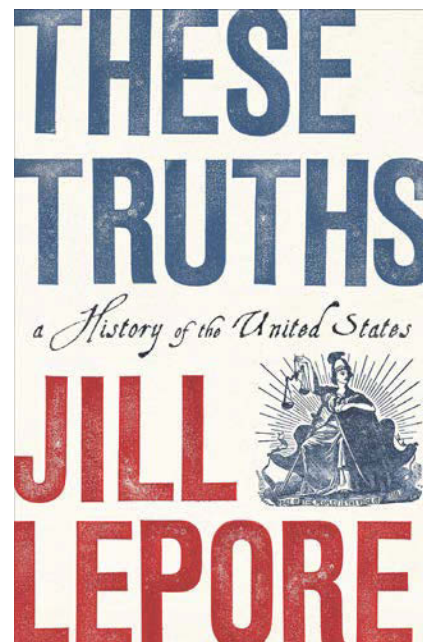
AL:

Lately I’ve been reading a lot about American history. I find it comforting in a weird way because the more I read, the more I realize that this country has always been batshit and nothing that has happened in the past two years has been exactly new. Right now I’m making my way through **THESE TRUTHS: A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES** by Jill Lepore (2018, W. W. Norton), very slow-

ly because the book itself is way too heavy for me to schlep on the el every day. I’ve just reached the Mexican War and already there have been at least three stolen elections, a lot of dirty politics, and some really ridiculous showboating, like the early 19th century equivalents of Fox News and Twitter. And lo, the country endured!

But this particular book is also enraging because it explains the origins of our gov-

ernment in a way that I have never seen it explained before. (Or maybe it was explained to me, but my high school government teacher had nothing on Jill Lepore.) It’s enraging to realize that the Constitution was built on the assumption that the government would always be run by rich white men, just like the rich white men who wrote it in the first place. I know I should be inspired by all the people over the past 230 years who have fought ➔



ARTS & CULTURE

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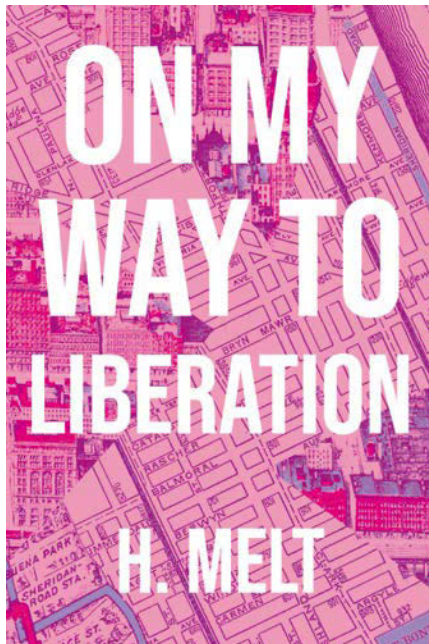
that system, but thinking about the colossal weight of that history and what it will take to dismantle it—short of another revolution—makes me tired.

When I am especially tired and angry, I read romance novels for comfort because I know they will always end happily, with the characters learning to bring out the best in each other. (Rape as a plot element went out of style about 20 years ago; now everybody's all about enthusiastic consent.) One I have been thinking about a lot lately is *THE SUFFRAGETTE SCANDAL* by Courtney Milan (2014, self-published). It's about a feminist newspaper publisher in England in the 1870s who is fighting off a conspiracy to destroy her paper led by a misogynist peer who is angry that she wouldn't sleep with him. A self-described scoundrel offers to help her because he, too, hates this misogynist peer. At one point he asks the publisher why she keeps putting out her paper in the face of so much opposition. He compares her fight for equality to emptying the Thames with a thimble. She reminds him that her paper is for women. They're not trying to empty the Thames, she tells him. They're taking those thimbles full of water and using them to grow their own gardens. It's a beautiful metaphor, I think, and it makes me a little less tired and a little more hopeful.

Sarah, what are you reading?

SH:

Currently, I'm finishing the final chapters of *GOOD AND MAD: THE REVOLUTIONARY POWER OF WOMEN'S ANGER* by Rebecca Traister. If you tilt the book back and forth, you can see embossed letters shouting across the book's cover: "F*ck F*ck F*ck." That alone could probably sell this book. But, wait, there's more! Traister documents the catalytic power of rage in shaping American history and politics. She analyzes the ways in which white male rage (like that of the founding fathers) is taught as rational and admirable, while women's anger—especially black women's anger—is characterized as ludicrous, unhealthy, and—worst of all—unattractive. When I first got this book, I was afraid that it was just going to be a painful re-hashing of the 2016 election and thereafter, but it illuminates a long legacy of anger from the shirtwaist factory strikers to Emmett Till's mother to gay liberation activist Marsha P. Johnson and so many others. Traister's writing pushes me to own my



anger as a tool and asks, now, what are you going to do with it?

Although I finished it a few months ago, I cannot talk about books right now without talking about *HEAVY* by Kiese Laymon. This memoir, written to Laymon's mother, is not the book that he set out to write. "I wanted to write a lie. You wanted to read that lie. I wrote this to you instead." In a largely chronological account, Laymon writes with exceptional vulnerability about family trauma, sexual violence, and systemic racism, conveying the weight that all of this history has placed on his own body as well as the bodies of those he loves—especially his mother and grandmother. And that is perhaps the most astonishing thing about this book—the way in which it pulses with such relentless, fierce love. I honestly read whole passages holding my breath, not wanting to disturb the reverie.

I also have to mention H. Melt, my colleague at Women & Children First, who has a new chapbook called *ON MY WAY TO LIBERATION*. It's a beautiful reckoning that begins with direct, unflinching testaments of the erasure and the violence inflicted on trans people every day but then moves forward to imagining a future of joyful and fearless trans visibility. This has been such an exciting year for Chicago poetry and H. Melt is a critical voice within that community.



Burning

MOVIES

Lost in translation

Lee Chang-dong's *Burning* demonstrates the perils of trying to adapt Haruki Murakami to the screen.

By BEN SACHS

I understand why there are so few film adaptations of Haruki Murakami's fiction. His novels and stories are inherently literary—their most important developments tend to take place in the protagonists' thoughts, while the narrative turns emerge from outside of the characters' agency. His protagonists are generally passive; they don't drive the narratives, but rather things happen to them. By employing these strategies, Murakami conveys how bewildering and overwhelming contemporary life can be, suggesting that our lives, however deliberately we plan them, are ultimately governed by forces beyond our control. This worldview seems difficult to translate into cinematic narratives, which often thrive on concrete actions. Tran Anh Hung's film of *Norwegian Wood* (2010)—the most ambitious movie adaptation of a Murakami work prior to Lee Chang-dong's *Burning*—demonstrated this all too well. Tran simply couldn't get inside the protagonist's head, so the character's feelings of confusion and sad fascination (which drive Murakami's novel) didn't come

through. In the end, the film set a mood and accomplished little else.

The prospect of a Lee-directed Murakami adaptation carried considerable promise. Of all the major filmmakers to have emerged since the fall of South Korea's dictatorship, Lee (who wrote novels before he turned to filmmaking) comes closest to conveying the pleasures of great fiction. His movies generally follow characters over extended periods of time as they undergo serious internal transformations. He doesn't employ voice-over narration or direct addresses to get inside his characters; instead he patiently observes them so that viewers come to recognize changes in their behavior and outlook. His previous four films—*Peppermint Candy* (1999), *Oasis* (2002), *Secret Sunshine* (2007), and *Poetry* (2010)—represent the crown jewels of modern South Korean cinema, exhibiting such rich investment in psychology and milieu that one gains tremendous insight not only into the characters, but into the society they inhabit. Lee's body of work inspires confidence that he could translate into sounds and images the in-

★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★ GOOD ★★ AVERAGE ★ POOR ● WORTHLESS

BURNING ★★

Directed by Lee Chang-dong. In Korean with subtitles. 149 min. Music Box, 3733 N. Southport, 773-871-6604, musicboxtheatre.com, \$11.



teriority of Murakami's characters and social forces that steer them.

For the most part, *Burning* (based on Murakami's 1992 short story "Barn Burning") achieves this. The film paints vivid portraits of three distinct characters and inspires sympathy with a bewildered protagonist; moreover, it depicts a particular social milieu—that of underemployed twentysomethings in contemporary Seoul—in such a way that one comes to see it as existing beyond the subjects' control. Lee works on a grand scale here, shooting in wide-screen and often employing long takes that convey an epic sense of anticipation, and by rendering the story so monumental, he makes it seem somewhat unapproachable, much like Murakami does through his forbidding minimalist prose. At the same time, Lee's art works at cross-purposes to Murakami's. He likes to explain things that the author would prefer to keep ambiguous; in a sense, he wants to get deeper into the characters' heads than even Murakami does. Lee's insistence on three-dimensional realism takes him only so far, since he also does his best to preserve Murakami's sense of unresolved mystery, and this has the effect of nullifying the director's social observations. The movie feels like an extended stalemate between two very different master storytellers, though the clash of sensibilities is also instructive, pointing to a tension in contemporary life between individualist and systems-based philosophies.

Burning begins in Seoul when Jong-su (Yoo Ah-In), an aspiring novelist in his mid-20s, meets Hae-mi (Jeon Jong-seo), a young woman who grew up in the small farm town outside the city where he's recently returned to live. Hae-mi encourages Jong-su to ask her on a date, and the two meet one evening after she gets off work. They have sex in her apartment—a typically reluctant Murakami protagonist, Jong-su lets Hae-mi initiate it—

and afterwards, she tells him that she's going to Kenya on a vacation and that she'd like him to feed her cat while she's away. A few weeks later, Hae-mi returns, having befriended another South Korean, Ben (Steven Yeun), whom she met at the Nairobi airport. The three start hanging out on a regular basis, with Jong-su growing visibly jealous of the older, well-to-do Ben. One night at Jong-su's family farm, Ben shares a joint with the hero and Hae-mi, then makes an interesting confession to Jong-su after the young woman falls asleep: Ben says he likes to burn down abandoned greenhouses about every two months and that he plans to set fire to one near Jong-su's residence. Not long after this, Hae-mi disappears, leaving no trace of where she may have gone. Jong-su begins to investigate her absence, coming to suspect that Ben is somehow involved.

The film differs from Murakami's story in several crucial ways. In the source material, the protagonist is older, married, and relatively successful, and his relationship with the young woman is chaste. His interest in her and his jealousy of the rich gentleman are essentially hankerings for connection that he can't quite articulate. Lee, who wrote the film's script with Oh Jungmi, gives the character enough of a backstory so that audiences can fill in the details of the character's longing. We learn that Jong-su is not only frustrated in writing, but underemployed; one reason he moves back to his father's farm is that he can't find a job in Seoul. Jong-su also comes from a broken home. His mother left the family when he was a boy due to his father's anger problems, and the father now awaits sentencing for having assaulted a government officer. Lee devotes a fair amount of *Burning* to the father's trial and Jong-su's efforts to clear the old man's name, but this subplot amounts to something of a red herring, providing little insight into the hero's obsession with Hae-mi.

And where Murakami's story ends soon after the young woman disappears, *Burning* goes on for about another hour, with the hero mentally unraveling as he searches in vain for clues.

“Barn Burning” ends on an ambiguous note, concluding that modern life is inherently unexplainable, but Lee manages to bring *Burning* to a sense of finality. Without giving anything away, I’ll say that I find Lee’s ending less satisfying than Murakami’s, in part because it tries to make a concrete point about Jong-su where Murakami prefers to leave things open-ended. The author’s writing lingers in the memory because of its tantalizing lack of resolution; Lee, in pursuing graspable insight, points to his fundamental incompatibility with Murakami. The film’s insights about the driftlessness of South Korean millennials also grant the story a more distinctive social context than one typically finds in Murakami’s fiction, suggesting somewhat reductively that the central mystery can be read as a metaphor for young people’s inability to establish meaningful roots in their lives. It feels like the director wanted to have things both ways, conveying Murakami’s

ambiguity while asserting his own ability to explain people's motivations.

Still, Lee is too good a storyteller to succumb to blatant rhetoric; the shortcomings of *Burning* emerge only in hindsight, when the larger schematic structure comes into focus. As it unfolds, the film is thoroughly commanding, thanks to the director's control over tone and the strong performances he elicits from his cast. Yuen is especially powerful, suggesting Ben's confidence and allure while purposely leaving the character's inner life a blank. (You can never tell whether his bright-eyed smile is sincere.) As Jong-su, Yoo gets the passivity of the Murakami protagonist so well that the film feels off when the character begins to act on his curiosity. This points again to the difficulty of translating Murakami to the screen, which Lee never fully overcomes. Yet in failing to bring the story to a satisfying conclusion, he manages to articulate the gnawing dissatisfaction that underlies much of Murakami's writing. 

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ARTS & CULTURE

THE FAVOURITE ★★★★★
Directed by Yorgos Lanthimos.
R, 129 min. In wide release.

MOVIES

All the queen's maids

The Favourite suggests the path to power in the early 18th century British royal household went right through the bedchamber.

By **ANDREA GRONVALL**

Watching Greek auteur Yorgos Lanthimos's latest film (his third in English and his first period piece), I was reminded of a young woman whom I once knew slightly and hadn't thought of in decades, an articulate, pretty, graceful blond gold digger, who took her mother's example to heart—to wit, it's just as easy to marry for love *and* money as it is to marry for love alone. Luckily (depending on your level of cynicism) for her, this twentysomething Lorelei Lee's wealthy, drug-addict husband obligingly died in a road accident while driving under the influence, leaving his widow very comfortably well off and ready for her next conquest.

I cite this not because I disdained her—on the contrary, her lack of bourgeois cant was intriguing, although she would have been more likable if she had shown any natural talents beyond sniffing out the dough. Because anyone—woman or man—who weds for money, position, or power is highly mercenary. And that's what makes the obsidian-black comedy

The Favourite so bracing: two alluring, clever, resourceful, and ruthless “ladies” of the early 18th century British royal household, Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, Keeper of the Privy Purse (Rachel Weisz), and her déclassé cousin, Abigail Hill (Emma Stone), are so locked in competition for the favors of Queen Anne (Olivia Colman) that her bedchamber becomes a key battlefield. “Intriguing” doesn't begin to describe them, and “likable” rarely does.

Although the movie is based on actual personages, early in development Lanthimos jettisoned much of the historical detail of first-time screenwriter Deborah Davis's meticulously researched script and brought in a second writer, Australian playwright and TV veteran Tony McNamara, who specializes in skewering dysfunctional families. Anyone who's seen the director's previous works *Dogtooth* (2009), *Alps* (2011), *The Lobster* (2015), and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017) knows this is Lanthimos territory, a landscape frequently strewn with the detritus of warring relatives and tribes. The mordant humor he and cowriter Efthymis Filippou demonstrated in those four enigmatic films is buttressed here by a vigorous, stinging wit that indicates the status of the privileged castes, whose precise if bawdy command of the English language is among the most lacerating of their snares.

The plot of *The Favourite* (spoilers ahead) begins straightforwardly enough: Abigail, a one-time gentlewoman who was sold as payment for a gambling debt by her profligate father, has recently escaped sexual bondage to a gross old fart with a tiny penis and the credulity to accept her claim that menses last a full 28 days. Arriving at the royal palace to seek employment with her cousin the duchess, Abigail is kicked unceremoniously from her carriage into the fecal mud that covers the lawns. Where else is there for her to go but up?

Her rise from scullery wench to chambermaid is rapid after she gives the ailing queen an herbal salve for her debilitating gout. From



The Favourite

then on out, Abigail will pivot between pain and pleasure as she inveigles to supplant the imperious Sarah as Anne's most trusted confidante—and lover.

Sarah, who was Anne's childhood friend before they became lovers, is not so easily dislodged. The hot-tempered, sharp-tongued duchess wields an astonishing amount of power, even more than her husband John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough (Mark Gatiss), a brilliant military strategist prosecuting a long and unpopular war against the French, a cause his wife advances. Their chief foe at court is the Tory fop Robert Harley, first Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer (Nicholas Hoult), who protests that escalating war taxes are ruining him. Seeing a vulnerable woman he thinks he can bully, Harley enlists Abigail as his spy, throwing his pal, the gentleman Samuel Masham (Joe Alwyn), at her to sweeten the deal. But marriage is just another transaction to Abigail, who sets her sights on the queen's bedroom.

As the intrigue heightens in *The Favourite*, so do the film's surreal touches. For sport, Harley and companions pelt a fat naked fop with blood oranges. The noblemen race ducks (the live kind). Anne keeps a menagerie of 17 rabbits, each standing in for one of the children she miscarried, were stillborn, or died young. The most bizarre scene is a fancy ball where Sarah and Masham cavort like acrobats before attempting a *Soul Train*-like line dance. (Weird dances also figure into Lanthimos's earlier films, maybe to show that characters who are capable of great cruelty are also capable of great daffiness?) Yet it is through dance that Abigail shows her kindest side to the queen, coaxing the depressed Anne from her wheelchair to make some tentative moves across the floor.

For all the agency the three protagonists exhibit—unusual for women in that era, but again, the habitually antirealist Lanthimos here is playing fast and loose with history—

they are each, in a sense, trapped like the queen's rabbits, albeit in prettier cages. Anne is widowed and without heirs, never fully sure about the motives of those around her, and prone to self-doubt about her abilities. Sarah, cunning political animal that she is, can never really relax because she knows how one slip can bring everything crashing down. And Abigail, clawing her way to the top, is all too aware how closely her progress is being monitored by courtiers and the household staff. The fishbowl lenses employed by cinematographer Robbie Ryan (*American Honey*, *I, Daniel Blake*) allow the viewer to access the protagonists' mental states, as we see the women dwarfed by the size of the royal estate and the threat of unpredictable caprices. In that hothouse atmosphere, one could easily be tempted always to look over one's shoulder, although that action would not be advisable.

Power abhors a vacuum, and Sarah's increased absences from court to oversee the construction of Blenheim Palace—Anne's little “thank you” gift for all that Sarah does—embolden Abigail to press the advantage. Blossoming under the young woman's expert ministrations, the queen rewards her with a higher station. But as *The Favourite* enters its final chapters, reversals await the two rivals for Anne's affections. It's wicked fun to watch their clear-eyed lack of sentimentality as they trade their bodies for her largesse—to the extent that for most of the picture the queen merits our empathy for being so used. But it's not as if the royal is going to leave the gold diggers anything in her will. (In real life, after Anne passed, everything she owned went to her second cousin the Elector of Hanover, who became King George I.) The film's final shot, a dazzling triple exposure, shows Anne commanding, not requesting, sexual satisfaction, and Abigail—though she now has a title, a husband, and more wealth than she could have imagined—complying on her knees. How far has she really come? **A**

MOVIES

Inquiring Nuns

In this fascinating 1968 documentary, one of the earliest by Kartemquin Films, two outgoing Catholic nuns, Sister Marie Arne and Sister Mary Campion, walk around Chicago asking people if they're happy. The answers they get are reasoned, spiritual, sometimes philosophical, and, in one case, frankly sexual, but a recurring motif is hope that the Vietnam war will end soon. The sisters' warmth and interest are reciprocated by their subjects, most of whom show concern for others and little regard for their moment in the spotlight. Gordon Quinn and Gerald Tamener directed. **—ANDREA GRONVALL 2009 66 min. Restored 16mm print. Quinn and additional guests attend the Friday, Saturday, and Wednesday screenings. Fri 11/30, 6 PM; Sat 12/1, 8 PM; Sun 12/2, 3:30 PM; Mon 12/3, 6:15 PM; Tue 12/4, 8 PM; Wed 12/5, 6 PM; and Thu 12/6, 8 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center**

Pendular

He's a sculptor, she's a choreographer; they share a loft where they live and work, host fun parties, and have great sex. Things seem to be going well until she begins dropping hints that she yearns for greater independence and he starts expressing interest in raising a family. Júlia Murat wrote and directed this Brazilian art film, which charts the couple's daily routine before subtly introducing signs of their discontent. The movie is so subtle, in fact, that you may not recognize the protagonists' unhappiness until the story's almost over, though at that point you may have grown tired of the excessively underplayed drama. Murat's inventive visual compositions keep this watchable, as do the explicit sex scenes, which build upon the characterization in addition to generating erotic fascination. Still, you might wish there were more to the story than the slender details Murat provides. In Portuguese with English subtitles. **—BEN SACHS 108 min. Fri 11/30, 7 PM; Sat 12/1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 PM; Sun 12/2, 1, 3, 5, and 7 PM; Mon 12/3–Thu 12/6, 7 and 9 PM. Facets Cinematheque**

Las Sandanistas

In this documentary, Chicago filmmaker Jenny Murray examines a little-known chapter of Central American history: the role of female combatants in the Sandinista revolution and the Contra wars of Nicaragua between 1979 and 1990. The veterans she interviews cut across social classes—peasant, landowner, intellectual—which underscores the fact that the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) campaign to end the dynastic dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza was a widespread popular uprising. Journalist Sofía Montenegro is perhaps the most world-weary of Murray's subjects: she joined the FSLN but her family supported Somoza, and her

brother was eventually captured and executed by the Sandinistas. The most analytical is former Minister of Health Dora María Téllez, a natural-born tactician who at age 22 led insurrectionists to take the city of León. Women comprised 30 percent of the Sandinista forces, fighting alongside men, but at war's end sexism gradually reascended in the culture; poet Daisy Zamora lost her standing in the Ministry of Culture after she rebuffed the sexual advances of a powerful official. Those profiled decry the Sandinista party's shift to the right, citing strict antiabortion laws and other human rights infringements under the leadership of current President Daniel Ortega. As fascinating as these women are, the film would have been stronger if a clearer timeline and more interviews with their male military colleagues had been included (although Noam Chomsky and Bernie Sanders pop up in archival footage). In English and subtitled Spanish. **—ANDREA GRONVALL 96 min. Fri 11/30, 4 and 8 PM; Sat 12/1, 2 and 7:45 PM; Sun 12/2, 5 PM; Mon 12/3, 8 PM; Tue 12/4, 6 PM; Wed 12/5, 8:15 PM; and Thu 12/6, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center**

Sing-a-Long Sound of Music

Many critics trashed Robert Wise's 1965 screen version of *The Sound of Music*, but the musical's emotional openness and unguarded optimism honestly express the worldview of songwriters Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. In the words of theater historian Ethan Mordden, their last collaboration is a “youthful piece written by the elderly, because it is entirely about freedom, which youth always seeks and the aged feel the loss of.” The film's sweeping aerial cinematography and Salzburg location footage and Julie Andrews's smart, feisty performance enhance the story's appeal, and this “sing-along” edition, outfitted with subtitles for the lyrics, affirms Rodgers and Hammerstein's belief in the power of music to unlock the buoyancy of the human spirit. **—ALBERT WILLIAMS 2009 G, 174 min. Sat 12/1–Sun 12/2, 11:30 AM. Music Box**

White Nights

Long dismissed as a footnote to Luchino Visconti's career, this 1957 film, from the Dostoyevsky story, now seems to be a crucial turning point, the link between Visconti's early neorealist manner and the obsessive stylization of his late films. Shot on forthrightly false sets entirely within a studio, the film brings a lonely stranger (Marcello Mastroianni, in one of his first important parts) together with a surrealistically detached woman (Maria Schell) for a brief, enigmatic affair. Robert Bresson treated the same material in his *Four Nights of a Dreamer*; curiously, it became one of Bresson's most socially oriented films, while this is one of Visconti's least. In Italian with subtitles. **—DAVE KEHR 1985 97 min. 35mm archival print. Sun 12/2, 5 PM, and Tue 12/4, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center** **A**



Pendular

NEW TRASH MAKE VIDEOS WITH FLASH, PANACHE, AND NOT MUCH CASH

The young Chicago production duo demonstrate how to make an asset of a low budget on a shoot with local rappers Mother Nature.

By **JACK RIEDY**

Photos by **ALLISON ZIEMBA**

“WATER? COFFEE? GUSHERS? FRUIT BY THE FOOT?”

offered director Connor Wiles as his volunteer crew carried equipment past classrooms filled with board games and crates of toys. Over two days in mid-November, Wiles and his partner in the production company New Trash, Nat Alder, turned part of the Kidz Express Boys & Girls Club in Austin into a music-video set for Chicago hip-hop duo Mother Nature. This was to be New Trash’s 30th video in less than three years, and they’ve developed a vibrant, playful style both despite and because of their typically minuscule budgets—the Mother Nature shoot would cost about \$500.

Launched in summer 2016, New Trash quickly earned notoriety working fast and cheap with artists from the

local underground scene, filming fistfights, dance troupes, vampires, and more. That reputation helped them land a job this year with breakout Chicago rapper Valee, who’s signed to Kanye West’s GOOD Music and distributed by Def Jam. Their video for his track “Juice & Gin” has a surreal, B-movie-futuristic party vibe, alternately soaked in DayGlo fluorescence and blood-red light. It’s by far the biggest platform yet for New Trash’s distinctive DIY aesthetic—coated in spray paint and splashed with radioactive ooze, like something from the VHS collection of the coolest person at a comic book store. “Our guarantee is, we will shoot even if it’s two of us and an iPad or 40 people and a Def Jam artist,” says Alder.

For the Mother Nature production, Wiles and Alder were joined by four crew members: camera operator David Hughes Jr., lighting director Anastasia Mikolyuk, and

Camera operator David Hughes Jr. (left) and New Trash codirector Nat Alder shoot Klevah Knox of Mother Nature on one of the classroom sets at Kidz Express.

designers Olivia Laird and Claire Wiles (Connor’s younger sister), who converted a Kidz Express classroom into two color-saturated sets. “Everyone who we bring onto the project is there for that collaboration and is doing it for the chance to make something fun—art for art’s sake,” says Alder. “We can shoot in a single day, we don’t have to hire sound people, and we can do it quick and dirty and emulate people we love.”

New Trash’s founders are young—Wiles is 24, Alder 23—and with encouragement from their fathers, they developed idiosyncratic tastes even younger. Wiles dug deeply into Gene Kelly and John Waters, while Alder fell in love with Steven Spielberg and Robert Rodriguez. Wiles is into expressionist spectacle—what he calls “smash and panache”—and Alder has a dark sense of humor that drives his interest in the “inner perversions” of his characters. The two of them met in fall 2013, during their first week of classes at Columbia College, where Wiles was impressed by Alder’s movie knowledge at an icebreaker event.

“They throw chips at you if you answer trivia questions, and Nat was just ringing them out. He had more chips than he could carry,” Wiles says. Through their four years at Columbia, where they both pursued BFAs in Cinema Art and Science, they became friends and colleagues, filling roles on each other’s productions.

New Trash began in earnest just before their senior year. Columbia offers select teams of filmmakers in its Advanced Practicum class a small budget to make a short film, in exchange for which the school owns the final product. But Wiles and Alder had a different idea. “We didn’t want Columbia to own our work,” says Wiles, “so we didn’t take any money from them and instead decided to put our time and effort into using grindhouse and classic cheap-movie techniques to produce our own pieces at no to low cost.”

Alder and Wiles spent their senior year making music videos. The first was for “Crucifix” by Chicago folk-punk band Little Yellow Dog, whose members Wiles had met while filming at defunct DIY venue the Keep (bandleader Dakota Buyka lived there for several months). Valee has been their only major-label client so far, but over New Trash’s brief lifetime they’ve expanded their reach to work with an increasingly diverse roster of artists.

For Latinx prog rockers Avantist, New Trash crafted a harrowing black-light hallucination speckled with disembodied eyeballs (“Red Bible”); for dark electro-pop outfit Pixel Grip, they conjured a 1980s-style dystopia populated by hazmat-suited dancers (“Golden Moses”); for Milwaukee garage band the Pukes, they turned a slapstick John Waters-inspired heist sequence into a bloody party, complete with a dildo fight, a cameo by a kinky Jesus, and a robber made up like Waters’s favorite drag queen, Divine (“Execution”). In April 2017, Alder and Wiles made a video for “Coins,” by Chicago synth-rock eccentrics Woongi, that depicts a generic Barney-type dinosaur under siege from a group of kids, with a sort of suburban *Lord of the Flies* feel. On the day of the shoot, though, New Trash couldn’t find anyone to wear the dinosaur costume—so Wiles stepped into the fuzzy purple shoes himself. As Alder filmed from a borrowed golf cart, he ran through a field in Barrington, chased by a preteen soccer team wielding cardboard spears.

Wiles jokes that his dream collaborator is “anyone who wants to,” but New Trash’s standards are simple. “A good



Nat Alder of New Trash blows fake snow at T.R.U.T.H. (foreground) and Klevah Knox of Mother Nature. Lighting director Anastasia Mikolyuk is at far right.



David Hughes Jr., New Trash cofounders Connor Wiles and Nat Alder, and set designer Olivia Laird watch Mother Nature and the Kidz Express kids run through a take.

song goes a long way,” Alder says. “You hear it once and you think, ‘There’s no way we’re not shooting this.’”

At Kidz Express, Alder and Wiles were making a video for Mother Nature’s unreleased song “Simple.” In April of this year they’d booked the duo—Shasta Matthews, aka Klevah Knox, and Tierney Reed, aka T.R.U.T.H.—to perform at a New Trash video-release party for Chicago pop artist Liska Steele. They hadn’t seen Mother Nature perform before, and they were bowled over by the rappers’ command of the stage. Alder and Wiles screened the duo’s video for “This Yo Year” at the party too. “That’s where we met New Trash,” said Matthews, as she weaved metal rings into Reed’s hair for the shoot. “They were just playing videos, and then they played our video, which they didn’t do—but they celebrated us, you know?”

New Trash later cast Matthews and Reed in the “Juice & Gin” video. “We were thinking that we was gonna be extras,” Reed says. “We ended up being the main girls.” Alder and Wiles’s policy for clients is “pay what you can,” and Valee’s people could afford to exceed New Trash’s usual “no to low cost” range. Wiles says they splurged by hiring “an actual producer who knows how to do paperwork.”

Wiles and Alder freelance as video editors and work as production assistants to support themselves, but they’re optimistic that New Trash will eventually get them properly paid directing gigs. “We are of course building a portfolio to hopefully land bigger-budget projects where we have the opportunity to pay our crew back,” says Wiles. “Many of them have repeatedly donated their time and talent. But at this stage, all the budget goes to what you’re seeing on the screen.” ➔



The conceit of Mother Nature's "Simple" video is that the kids directed it themselves—here Connor Wiles (center) helps nine-year-old Landon Sanders, who plays the camera operator.



Connor Wiles plays back video footage for some of the child actors and dancers from Kidz Express. Klevah Knox is at far left, Nat Alder at far right.



Klevah Knox, Connor Wiles, and David Hughes Jr. (top)

continued from 27

The Valee shoot got Mother Nature interested in making a New Trash video of their own. "They're very DIY, which is our approach. We do everything by ourselves," Matthews says. "We're constantly having to compromise and wear all these hats."

Mother Nature had already come to Kidz Express to give a workshop on writing and performing, invited by Imani Hardy, who manages the facility's after-school hip-hop club. (He also raps under the name Mani Jurdan as part of the HUEY Gang crew.) When Reed and Matthews recorded "Simple," they recruited a half dozen kids from the club to add vocals to the

hook, complementing the song's bright, bouncy instrumental. These same children agreed to appear in the video too, and New Trash were given use of the Kidz Express space for free.

For New Trash, DIY isn't a philosophy so much as a reality they've adapted to—making videos with little more than passion for the work. "If somebody told me they would give me money to direct a Nickelodeon show," Wiles jokes, "I would be out of here in a fucking second."

When planning their shoots, Wiles and Alder aim for striking visuals that they can accomplish on a low budget. After initial discussions with a client, they guide further conceptualization by assembling a lookbook of references from film, photography, paintings, and architecture. "If [the musicians] have big thematic ideas, it's like, 'Look, we'll try and boil this into the DNA as best we can, but the realities of the day are what they are,'" Alder says. "Maybe we won't have a giant laser cross, but we'll try to do *something* with lasers."

The "Simple" video draws from the exaggerated aesthetic of maximalist late-90s hip-hop videos, particularly the work of director Hype Williams. The crew's shot list called for colors "shiny and bold like a piece of candy wrapped in cellophane," and its central conceit is that the kids themselves are directing a video for Mother Nature.

On the first day of filming, the six young performers arrived an hour later than expected. Hughes and Mikolyuk set up a set-within-a-set on a parking lot next to the playground, hoping to capture as much daylight as possible. They arranged a director's chair, lights, a VHS camera, and a green screen with an eight-foot dolly track passing in front of it at waist height. The uncanny feeling of watching a real film crew shooting a pretend film crew was only intensified when one of the kids, 11-year-old Jovon Black, began livestreaming the whole thing on his phone.

As the oldest of the children, Black exerted a moderating influence on the others, suggesting, "Be y'all, but don't be too much of y'all." It was 30 degrees outside, and the first snow of the season fell that day, but the kids brought all the pent-up energy they'd usually blow off at the end of a school day to the set. They Milly Rocked and did the Shoot dance, and they sang along to their own voices on the hook: "I do not do what you do / Keep it simple / I am me and you are you / Keep it simple."

Wiles talked the kids through each take, and when Kidz Express assistant director Marco Dodd could take a break from his duties, he stepped in as an acting coach. For a scene where nine-year-old Danielle Reed was supposed to throw a script binder off her directing chair in frustration, he called, "Act like you're mad at your brother!"

As it got dark, the crew moved into the gym. The kids followed Hughes's camera as it spun with them, the background a blur behind their faces. They lip-synced as they stood in a static shot that imitated a class picture. When Wiles lined the kids up for individual dance features, they seemed to find new reserves of energy. Each one leaped into frame, improvised moves for 12 bars, then ran around to the back of the line to wait for another turn—even in slow-motion, as some of that footage will appear in the the finished video, the dance relay was electric. The first day of shooting wrapped up at 6:30 PM, and the crew broke down the set in five minutes so Kidz Express could serve dinner in the gym.

Wiles was constantly in motion throughout the shoot, evaluating angles from behind the camera, then kneeling down to talk to kids before takes. He clutched a Bluetooth speaker that played the Mother Nature song so the children could stay in sync with it. They had little time to spare for reviewing footage and no way to do so except inside the camera—Wiles joked that the kids' prop monitor was the first one New Trash had ever had on set.

Alder moved in a different orbit. He frequently ducked into the building, retrieving equipment and refreshments while checking on Laird's set-construction progress. This dynamic is typical on New Trash sets. The pace of production requires Alder and Wiles to fill multiple roles simultaneously. "I'm a good liaison person. I talk to people and make sure everything's OK," Alder says. "This guy is a war horse, so he's good at calling a lot of the literal shots."

Mother Nature arrived at Kidz Express camera ready on the second day of shooting, both wearing black-and-white checkerboard pants and bright, warm-colored fleeces. Hyping themselves up with their own song and with "Live Sheck Wes," the two MCs strutted and flexed in front of the green screen—which will probably show a beach scene in the finished video—and then the camera pulled back to reveal the

set and the parking lot. That visual punch line will dovetail with the lyrics of the bridge: “Should have had it all by now.” As Wiles explains it, incorporating their set into a video is one way New Trash turn their low-budget production style into an asset—in this case, it becomes part of a self-deprecating joke.

The shoot was calmer with grown-up subjects, but it didn’t go entirely smoothly. New Trash had to abort several indoor takes when a snow machine malfunctioned. Even after Alder figured out how to fix its delay in dispensing fake flurries, the snow still wouldn’t blow toward the camera properly—the crew were stumped until Mikolyuk pointed to a vent in the ceiling. The shot was worth the trouble, though: Matthews and Reed leaned into each other against the sudden blizzard, taking pratfalls that drew laughs from the handful of people who’d gathered to watch.

When the kids arrived, they flocked to Mother Nature, and the directors tempted them away from these local celebrities with rough-cut footage from the previous day played on Wiles’s phone. The kids were entranced—they’ve grown up with smartphones, but they’d never seen themselves shot in slow motion at 120 frames per second. Intrigued by the filmmaking process, five-year-old Zyler Kidd pushed the camera back and forth on the dolly track (under Hughes’s supervision) until his older brother Zack called him back on set for another take.

Inside the gym, New Trash shot a sequence meant for the video’s credits. Hughes’s camera zoomed out from a Kidz Express sign, his extended shot taking in each of the kids with their movie-set props and Mother Nature lip-syncing the final chorus. Then Wiles asked everyone to gather together and cheer “like the end of every sports movie.” Nine-year-old Trashuwn Jones threw down the papier-mache boom mike he’d been valiantly holding above his head to join the bouncing, noisy throng. After postproduction, New Trash’s black-and-yellow logo would roll over that triumphant scene.

The production then relocated to the classroom that Laird and Claire Wiles had spent two days slathering with color. Mother Nature and the kids danced in front of a whiteboard covered in mock storyboards and neon Post-its. Nine-year-old Landon Sanders, freed from his post behind the prop camera, danced to the front as the MCs cheered him on. Each kid took a turn at the head of the room through two takes of the song, one with a stationary camera and another with Hughes floating through the crowd.

Alder called a wrap for the kids, and they celebrated with hugs from Matthews and Reed before rejoining their peers in the gym. The crew then pivoted 180 degrees to shoot the other half of the classroom, which had been transformed into a giant simulation of an elementary school diorama. Models of the planets hung from the ceiling, surrounding a mirrored comet with a cardboard tail. Mars-red gravel covered an off-white tarp. Reflective sheets of silver plastic, draped over two eight-foot stands, flowed onto the floor like carpeting on a spaceship.

The directors filmed Matthews and Reed prowling through the solar system as Mikolyuk twirled a red spotlight. The crew had initially rented a fisheye lens to distort the rappers’ faces when they got close to the camera, but they were stymied by a last-minute recall. “The rental company called and said, ‘It doesn’t work if you shine light through it,’” Alder says, laughing. “So it didn’t work at all.” Hughes got the desired effect anyway by setting up the camera even closer to his subjects. Reed watched some of the footage and said, “Looks like Puffy



Connor Wiles, David Hughes Jr., and T.R.U.T.H. and Klevah Knox of Mother Nature with the solar-system diorama at Kidz Express



David Hughes Jr. (center) films Mother Nature and the kids on the other classroom set.

and Mase”—referring to Hype Williams’s iconic video for Biggie’s “Mo Money Mo Problems.”

The moment the crew had finished filming, they flipped on the fluorescent classroom lights and efficiently dismantled the painstakingly constructed diorama. Laird offered the model of Saturn to anyone who would take it. Wiles transferred gigabytes of video to his laptop. The crew loaded up lights and equipment in a matter of minutes, stopping only to hug Matthews and Reed good-bye. Plans to use a smoke machine and shoot on the playground were cut for time. “The reality of production is the greatest decider of everything,” Wiles says.

The directors will face another time crunch finishing the production. Wiles and Alder are roommates, and they’ll be editing to meet a deadline a few weeks away while also hunting for a new apartment. The release date is still undetermined, but Mother Nature plans to roll out a new project in early 2019. Reed is sure the duo’s relationship with New Trash will continue. “This definitely won’t be the last video we work with them on,” she says.

Wiles and Alder have more projects in the pipeline, including their first video featuring animation. In the long term they want to expand to feature films, their goal since they arrived at Columbia. They also want to encourage fellow purveyors of their over-the-top style. “Give them the opportunities you wish somebody would’ve given you,” says Wiles.

Alder looks further into the future: “I think everybody who wants to make movies has this fantasy of being able to be famous enough that you can see an artist that you love and be like, ‘I wanna see what this person is gonna do with this kind of material,’” he says. “A big-picture plan we have would be to open a production company where we could foster talent and finance projects that don’t fit into any established line of Hollywood thinking.”

“I think New Trash is a writ-large idea, something that could easily transition into an actual production company,” Wiles adds. “God forbid we have any success.” 

 @jackriedy

PICK OF THE WEEK

Gong Gong Gong bring raw, minimalist rock from Beijing to Chicago



FLASHER, PUBLIC PRACTICE, GONG GONG GONG
Tue 12/4, 9 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, \$8. 21+

© JIA LI

TAKE A CHOPPY rhythm, sustain it past the point of comfort, and, if you must put something on top, keep it simple. If the Velvet Underground, the Monks, Neu!, and the Fall haven't already proved the merits of this strategy to you, Gong Gong Gong are ready to give you one more chance to grasp the facts. The Beijing-based duo have further reduced this method to the bare essentials: guitarist Tom Ng strums on each rhythm chord so persistently that you wonder if he thinks he has to pay a toll each time he adds a new one. Bassist Joshua Frank either matches Ng hack for hack or punches through his barrage with simple, stuttering melodies. Ng's sparse vocals on the EPs, mixes, and

live recordings available from the duo's Bandcamp page function mainly as an additional chanted counter-rhythm. But on "Siren," Gong Gong Gong's debut single for Wharf Cat, Ng spits out details of a car chase in Cantonese. If the locations where they've recorded some of this material are anything to go by—one album was recorded in a rehearsal studio on borrowed gear, another set was captured in an underpass—Gong Gong Gong are pretty underground in their hometown, but with "Siren" out and a new album reportedly in the works, they've managed to mount a tour that will take them through the U.S., the UK, and Europe.

—BILL MEYER



Makaya McCraven © DAVID MARQUES

FRIDAY29

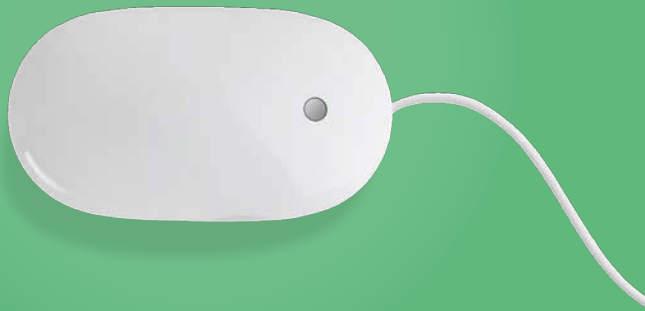
DRAB MAJESTY *Wingtips and Fee Lion* open. 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, sold out. 21+

Drab Majesty makes cool synth-pop for androgynous alien vampires and elaborate, moping androids. Deb Demure (aka Andrew Clinco) refers to his music as "tragic wave," and it's clear that he's inspired by the likes of Bauhaus and the Smiths. In the video for "39 by Design" from 2017's *The Demonstration* (Dais), Demure styles himself to look like a goth Andy Warhol while moaning out stentorian vocals about depression and space invasion: "Did they beam you up into the lights in the sky? / If you could take a Polaroid of your life / Would you cry?" Demure has been joined on tour by keyboardist Mona D (Alex Nicolaou) since 2016, and shrouded by the smoky lights of the stage, the two put on a live show that contains plenty of makeup, costumes, and somber drama. Though their cold, Kraftwerk-style retro-futurism is, and is supposed to be, amusing, Demure's theatrical melancholy can also be surprisingly and affectingly sincere. Drab Majesty's 2017 single "Oak Wood" is a tribute to musician Cash Askew, who died in the Ghost Ship fire in Oakland in 2016. "Why in the world would a God / Take someone as young as a child? / We revile in denial," Demure muses over stiff, otherworldly synth rhythms that seem to point toward a more artificial place that's too morbidly fabulous for human grief. —NOAH BERLATSKY

MAKAYA MCCRAVEN'S UNIVERSAL BEINGS 8 PM, Robeson Theatre, South Shore Cultural Center, 7059 S. South Shore, sold out. 18+

At 35, Chicago jazz drummer, producer, and bandleader Makaya McCraven possesses ➔

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Floorplan COURTESY THE ARTIST

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the wisdom of a musician twice his age. In a July interview with *Passion of the Weiss*, McCraven shared the reason why he decided to record his new *Universal Beings* (International Anthem) in New York, Chicago, London, and Los Angeles. "Each scene has its own vibe and its own energy, but I'm also trying to tell a larger story about how we're all part of an international, global art scene," McCraven said. "In this particular moment, there's an interesting movement in jazz where it's being redefined by young players and new audiences." McCraven is one of those young players, and he's using lessons and techniques from hip-hop, cumbia, funk, and strains of electronic music to build a bright path for the future of jazz while honoring its legacy. The music on *Universal Beings* comes from four improvised sessions—two from live sets at venues, two from private studios—with different combinations of collaborators, though cellist and composer Tomeka Reid played on two sessions (New York and Chicago). As he has for his previous releases, McCraven edited down the live material to create the final album. The wide-ranging, immersive *Universal Beings* has so much going for it that I'm still grasping all its details, but because I go hard for the local scene I've taken a particular interest in the suite of songs McCraven has dubbed "Chicago Side," recorded at Bridgeport venue Co-Prosperity Sphere in 2017—McCraven's playing is bolstered by his symbiotic relationship with bassist Junius Paul. Reid and tenor saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings ratchet up anxiety and provide a sense of relief on the sprawling, nervy "Atlantic Black," and build a mystical harmony around McCraven's boom-bap-inflected drumming on "Inner Flight." For tonight's debut ensemble performance, McCraven enlisted nine of the musicians who appeared on *Universal Beings*, including Tortoise's Jeff Parker, harpist Brandee Younger, and tenor saxophonist Nubya Garcia. —LEOR GALIL

FRIDAY30

APERIODIC 8:30 PM, Elastic, 3429 W. Diversey, \$10.

Since 2010, Aperiodic has enriched Chicago's new-music scene by performing new and rarely heard work by composers who augment their prescribed sounds with indeterminate events and collaborative processes. The ensemble, which is led by Nomi Epstein, has premiered or revived rarely performed work by Pauline Oliveros, Michael Pisaro, Christian Wolff, and Eva-Marie Houben. Now for its 36th performance the group turns inward, playing a program curated by its bass clarinetist, Jeff Kimmel. The selections include "Blackwing" (2018), a new piece by Canadian composer Linda Catlin Smith; "Extended Circular Music No. 8" by Jürg Frey, who is associated with the Wandelweiser collective; Makiko Nishikaze's "Moremelodies I" (2014), which was selected from Aperiodic's call for scores in 2017; and Kimmel's own "Aqua.flv." Kimmel's composition is inspired by a series of videos containing geometric shapes and high-pitched tones that began appearing by the thousands on YouTube in 2013 under the user ID Webdriver Torso. Some speculated that they were products of spies or aliens (the truth was much less exciting; the channel was created by YouTube to test quality control). Kimmel responded to the musical qualities of the videos, which he transcribed and sequenced into a composition. Video artist Kim Alpert will accompany the piece with a 3-D video. —BILL MEYER

JD MCPHERSON Joel Paterson opens. 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 1807 S. Allport, \$20-\$40. 17+

JD McPherson originally busted out on the roots-rock scene in 2010 with his single "North Side Gal." The lead track of his debut album, *Signs & Signifiers*, which was produced in Chicago by bassist-guitarist

MUSIC

Jimmy Sutton, the single features strutting rhythms and slangy lyrics that made it a mild radio staple and a must-have for any DJ working a rockabilly night or retro festival. But while the rest of that album, plus its 2015 follow-up, *Let the Good Times Roll*, showed McPherson to be a great songwriter capable of writing up-tempo songs in a 1950s R&B style (almost like a less intense Nick Curran), his influence soon spread far beyond rockabilly circles. On his third album, last year's *Undivided Heart & Soul*, McPherson smoothly transitioned his sound into a more generalized style of roots rock, à la Nick Lowe. That's the aesthetic he brought to Chicago this past September when he appeared at Riot Fest ("North Side Gal" stood out like an anomaly in his set). This month's *Socks* (New West) is McPherson's contribution to the Christmas rock canon as well as his return to rockabilly and R&B. The big swing revival of the late 90s negatively impacted the rockabilly scene; the two genres had similar audiences, and several rockabilly groups toned down their sound to rival the more genteel swing bands. The effects of that era can still be heard in those scenes decades later, but not in McPherson's music. While he isn't the wildest performer walking the boards today, he's not afraid to shout every now and then, and he remembers that there's more to traditional rock 'n' roll than making polite sounds to jive and stroll to. —JAMES PORTER

WUME *TAL*sounds and *Hujo* open. 9 PM, *Hideout*, 1354 W. Wabansia, \$10. 21+

The debut full-length album of exploratory Baltimore duo Wume, 2015's *Maintain* (Ehse), only sparingly features lyrics, and live the duo of drummer-vocalist April Camlin and keyboardist Albert Schatz generally lock into writhing Teutonic rhythms as compatible with twitchy electronica as with kosmische. But on their new album, *Towards*



Jarboe LASALLE

the *Shadow* (Northern Spy), the group edge toward embracing lyrical finery, making Camlin's voice the focal point of the compositions. Like the songs on its predecessor, the tunes ring out and ricochet with percussive persistence, but Camlin seems to grab the mike more frequently, or at least with more command. On "Functionary," she gets into a discussion of labor theory, pulling concepts from the Frankfurt school, while Schatz's sparse, shuddering electronics click away in the background. On the following track, "Shadow," her soft croons tether the song to 80s electro-pop. But the duo's juddering "Ravel" connects *Shadow* to *Maintain*, where songs such as "We Go Further" and "Voyager" brim with similar polyrhythmic dexterity. On this newer effort, Wume once again engage Krautrock tropes established by Ralf and Florian, but this time around they invigorate the template with some seriously sturdy melodies. —DAVE CANTOR

SATURDAY1

FLOORPLAN Bruce Bailey and John Simmons open. 10 PM, *Smartbar*, 3730 N. Clark, \$20, \$15 in advance. 21+

As an original member of politically progressive electronic group Underground Resistance, Robert Hood helped make techno one of Detroit's biggest exports during the late 80s. But in 1992, he set off on a solo career and began to shape the rhythmic, raw subgenre of minimal techno, often releasing his work under his M-Plant imprint. Hood has recorded under a litany of pseudonyms, including the Vision, Dr. Kevorkian, and Floorplan, which he launched in 1996 to focus on house music. In more recent years his music in that project has increasingly reflected his domestic and spiritual life; 14 years ago he moved his family to Alabama, where he now serves as a local minister, and in 2014 Floorplan morphed into a duo with the addition of Hood's 16-year-old daughter, Lyric. Hood has publicly spoken about his desire to show the intersection of house and gospel in Floorplan's music, but some of their newest releases include threads of techno too. The thumping title track off 2017's EP *Let the Church* (M-Plant) courses forward on frizzled, blown-out percussive loops; whenever the song's rhythmic skeleton drops out to make room for a brief, nearly screamed soul vocal sample, it manages to ratchet up the energy even further. —LEOR GALIL

SUNDAY2

JARBOE Father Murphy and the Pirate Twins open. 8 PM, *Beat Kitchen*, 2100 W. Belmont, \$15. 21+

Singer-songwriter, keyboardist, and composer Jarboe first drew national attention in the mid-80s for her role in Swans, and she remained the only consistent member of the band other than founder Michael Gira through their first breakup in 1997. She later reconciled her differences with Gira long enough to contribute to Swans' 2012 landmark *The Seer*. But to think of her artistry by Swans alone ➔

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continued from 33
does her a grave injustice; she's the creator of 13 solo albums and numerous collaborations (including my favorites, a 2003 album with iconic metal band Neurosis and a 2015 album with Chicago avant-garde cellist Helen Money). Last year's *Artbox* is a stunning collection of four CDs, including two containing new material, a live set recorded in 2009, and a deluxe version of her 2007 album *My Delicate Beast*, along with artwork she's made throughout the decades (plus, a metal pin!). Of the new pieces, "Space Prose" is a soaring meditational work, and "As Mind Dissolves as Song Begins" is a hackles-raising composition she delivers in her signature occult devotional style—eerie, ululating, otherworldly, yet somehow profoundly kind. Jarboe's subversive sonic shamanism integrates all of this artistic output into a whole that's greater than the sum of its parts. The forthcoming *The Cut of the Warrior* (out December 14 on Translation Loss) is inspired by Chöd, a branch of Tibetan Buddhist practice involving symbolic ritual sacrifice of the body. —**MONICA KENDRICK**

MONDAY3

PARQUET COURTS *Combo Chimbata opens.*
7:30 PM, the Vic, 3145 N. Sheffield, \$28.50. 18+

Parquet Courts are one of the most reliable names in indie rock. The Brooklyn four-piece release new material every year like clockwork, and most of it falls into their signature airtight, wiry postpunk pocket. But as far as I'm concerned, Parquet Courts are best when they step out of their comfort zone, such as on their experimental-leaning Parkway Quarts studio projects or their collaborative records—those include a 2015 team-up with noise rockers PC Worship (as PCPC) and last year's *Milano*, cowritten with Italian composer Daniele Luppi (who also produced) and featuring guest vocals by Karen O. On this May's *Wide Awake!* (Rough Trade) the band take their biggest risks yet, transforming from hella cool deadpan New York art-rockers into a Clash-

flavored dance-punk outfit. Produced by the always-groovy Danger Mouse, *Wide Awake!* showcases the band's undeniable sense of melody, while weaving together socially conscious messages with funky beats, jumpy bass lines, no-wave dissonance, and synth swells. It's another unexpected turn for the band, and as long as they keep the curveballs coming, I'll keep listening. —**LUCA CIMARUSTI**

TUESDAY4

GONG GONG GONG See *Pick of the Week*, page 31. *Flasher headlines; Public Practice and Gong Gong Gong open.* 9 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, \$8. 21+

H.E.R. *Bri Steves and Tone Stith open.* 7 PM, Riviera Theatre, 4746 N. Racine, sold out. 18+

In September 2016, RCA released *H.E.R. Volume 1*, the debut EP from an R&B singer whose stage name, H.E.R., is an acronym for "Having Everything Revealed." She didn't offer clues to her identity in the EP-release details, but Genius quickly found the receipts that showed H.E.R. to be the nom de plume of Gabi Wilson—which I suppose would mean something if the public had a long-term investment in Wilson and her music. She'd certainly given people the chance, starting from an early age: she covered Alicia Keys on *Maury* at age ten and continued to make the rounds on daytime TV (*Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, *The View*); at 14 she signed a deal with MBK Entertainment/J Records shortly before those labels were gobbled up by RCA in 2011. But since that time Wilson has been working on her music more discreetly, and she's re-emerged with an understanding of what she wants to say as a solo artist. As her string of H.E.R. EPs have landed solid-to-great positions on the *Billboard* charts (there are five to date, plus a 2017 compilation album called *H.E.R.*), Wilson has attempted to maintain the appearance of anonymity; in her first public interview since debuting

MUSIC



H.E.R.
SUE KWON

H.E.R., with the *L.A. Times* in July 2017, she awkwardly engaged in the secrecy shtick as if it were a strong narrative. Thankfully Wilson's music holds up beyond the gimmick, perhaps because it's more fun to believe that such otherworldly, moving songs couldn't possibly be made by a mere human. Her latest EP and second of the year, November's *I Used to Know Her: Party 2*, typifies the magnetic draw R&B appears to have on all of pop music at this moment. On "Hard Place," she uses hip-hop as a rhythmic base and gospel as a source of inspiration to make a triumphant ballad about loving someone who's wrong for you; Wilson's earnest singing brings emotional complexity to a familiar motif, and her increasingly powerful performance suggests there's a bright end to the story. —LEOR GALIL

WEDNESDAY

AMBER LIU *Justin Park opens. 7:30 PM, Park West, 322 W. Armitage, \$25.*

Amber Liu's tomboy fashion and tattoos have made her stand out among her peers in the crowded K-pop market, but they pale in comparison to the force of her personality. Liu is most known for being a member of f(x), an inventive girl group that's had some success among Western audiences. In 2013, they became the first K-pop band to play SXSW (though in a post-BTS world, being the first K-pop group to play an American festival seems like something that would've happened in wildly different times, not a few short years ago). More recently, the LA-born Liu has been releasing solo work on Soundcloud, including the mixtape *Rogue Rouge*, which contains tracks produced by people in her circle, such as Common Souls, Ryan Binhammer, and Gen Neo. It's a notable change in operation from f(x),

which was entirely assembled by SM Entertainment. "Rogue Rouge, to me, was the start of me trying to figure out if one of my missions was possible, and that mission was that 'friends in business' thing," Liu explained in a *Billboard* interview. Her solo work veers toward moody EDM and even contemplative moments of rap metal (she's covered Linkin Park's "One More Light" on her YouTube channel), a far cry from the delicate house music that dominates the most recent f(x) album, 2015's *4 Walls*. Liu's natural charisma helps give her solo work a more nakedly emotional directness that's not often found in K-pop. Tonight's show is part of her first solo tour.

—ED BLAIR

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SAVAGE LOVE

Bipolar kink, commitment, and drag

Advice on avoiding a hypersexual state and embracing hyperfeminine presentation

Q: I'm a 30-year-old, Asian-American, hetero-flexible cis woman. I'm also newly diagnosed with bipolar II. I'm on medication—the doctor is trying to figure that out—but no talk therapy for right now, as my last therapist wasn't great and I haven't managed to find a new one. My question for you is regarding the relationship between bipolar and kink. One of the common symptoms of the manic stage of bipolar is "risky sex." I equate risk with "likely to blow up one's personal or professional life" and have always answered "no" to that question when asked by doctors. I've had the occasional hookup, but otherwise I've consistently had sex in the context of closed,

monogamous relationships, i.e., the opposite of risky sex. However, it recently occurred to me that I'm fairly kinky (BDSM, role-play). Nothing I'd consider a varsity-level kink, but what do I know? I have out-there fantasies that are varsity level, but I've never done them. Am I just bipolar and kinky? Are the two related somehow? Should I be concerned that I'll go into a manic state and start enacting (or trying to enact) some of the varsity-level fantasies in my head?—**KINKY AND BIPOLAR**

P.S. I asked my doctor this via email, but I haven't heard back yet and have no idea how sex-positive he is. So I thought I'd get a second opinion.

P.P.S. I'm currently manic enough that it's hard for me to edit, so there may be weird/confusing shit in my letter. Sorry for that!

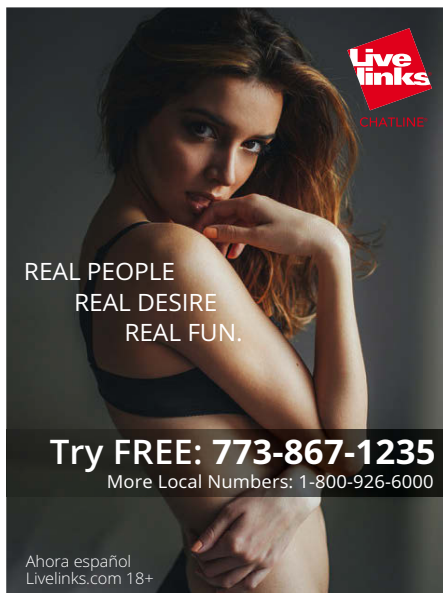
A: "I'd like to congratulate KAB for seeking help and for the work she's doing to get stable," said Ellen Forney, author of *Rock Steady: Brilliant Advice From My Bipolar Life*, an award-winning self-help guide to maintaining stability, and the best-selling graphic memoir *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo & Me*. "I'd also like to welcome KAB to BIPOLAR! Toot! Toot! Confetti!"

The specific manic-stage symptom you're concerned about—engaging in super-risky sex—is called "hypersexuality," and it's what happens when the extremely poor judgment match meets the supercharged libido gas.

"But it's only 'hypersexuality' when it gets in the way of a reasonably well-functioning life," said Forney. "Picture masturbating all day instead of going to work, or having relationship-wrecking affairs or unprotected sex with strangers."

If your diagnosis is correct and you have bipolar II and not bipolar I, KAB, you may be less susceptible to out-of-control hypersexuality.

"Strictly speaking, a bipolar II diagnosis means she cycles between 'hypomania' (mild mania) and depression," said Forney, "so her highs aren't going to be as acute as they



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By Dan Savage

would be for someone diagnosed with bipolar I, where hypersexuality can really get dangerous."

Forney warns that misdiagnoses are not uncommon where bipolar is concerned, so you might want to get your diagnosis confirmed. But your long-standing kinks all by themselves—varsity and otherwise—aren't necessarily related to your condition, KAB, and so long as they're safely expressed and explored, you aren't doing anything unreasonably risky or wrong.

"Kinky sex in itself doesn't count as symptom-worthy risky sex—no matter what her doctor e-mails back," said Forney. "Like for anyone else, there's nothing necessarily wrong with feeling uninhibited enough to pursue varsity-level kinks, so long as they're not putting her or anyone else in danger. Ultimately, KAB's goal is to be stable enough to trust her judgment. For now, she might weigh the risks while she's feeling stable, so she can make some levelheaded decisions about what might or might not be too risky."

Forney also recommends having a discussion with your partners and friends about what your limits are—a discussion you'll want to have when you're not horny or manic or both.

"That way, her partners and friends can help her recognize if she's crossing her own lines," said Forney. "And realizing that she's suddenly tempted to cross her own lines could be a signal to her that she's getting hypomanic and needs to take steps to stabilize—steps like getting better sleep, adjusting her meds, and others I explore in *Rock Steady!*"

P.S. If your doctor won't answer your sex questions—or only gives you unhelpful, sex-negative, kink-shaming answers—find yourself a new doctor.

P.P.S. There are letters I have to read three times before I can figure out what the fuck is going on. Your letter was as lucid as it was charming.

P.P.P.S. Therapists across the country are recommending *Rock Steady* to their patients with mood disorders, and Forney won a Media Partner Award from the National Alliance on Mental Illness for her work on *Rock Steady* and *Marbles*. If you haven't already, KAB, please pick up Forney's books. You'll benefit from her insights, her advice, and her coping strategies. And, thanks to Forney's art and sense of humor, both books are a delight to read.

Q: I am 36 and female, and I've been with my current boyfriend for seven years. We were friends for four years before we started dating. He is very slow at making decisions and not a risk taker, and I am somewhat opposite. I think there are times when you have to take a leap of faith, and if it turns out it was a mistake, you learn and grow from it. We lived together on his family's property the first six years after I moved to his hometown. He's waiting in hopes that the property gets handed down to him. I don't live my life in hopes that something will happen that's out of my control, so I purchased my own home. He moved in. We have not split all costs in half because he said he needs to take care of the other home. It's been six months, and I'm growing impatient for him to commit. We've had several conversations, and I've given him until the end of the year to decide if we should go our separate ways. I said if we are going to be together, we need to be a team and support each other. He was actually taken aback because he thought we were

doing fine. One thing he said made me question it all. He said, "I feel that you're supposed to know and have this feeling when you're ready to move forward to be with a person forever." I was so confused by that comment. My friends say it can't only be me who wants this; he has to want it, too. Is it time for me to just move on?—MULLING OVER VERY EMOTIONAL OPTIONS NOW

A: Move on, MOVEON, but keep an open mind. Seeing you move on may help your boyfriend realize he does want to be with you forever—it'll help him "know"—and if you haven't realized in the interim that you don't want to be with him, you can move back in (and move on) together down the road. But unless inheriting the family property is a sure thing—a sure thing you'll both benefit from in the long run—he needs to pay his fair share. No more freeloading.

Q: Why should I, a feminist, be okay with drag? How is it any different than blackface?—TOUGH QUESTION

A: Drag can be sexist, TQ, but it doesn't have to be. And when done right, it isn't. Blackface is *always* racist. Drag celebrates the craft of hyperfeminine presentation. Drag demonstrates that so much of what we think of as "naturally" feminine is not just a social construct, but quite literally a *construction*. Drag has the power to explode sexism, to expose it, by complicating people's preconceptions and misconceptions about what it means to be a woman. Blackface can only reinforce and amplify racism. **✂**

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NEW

American Steel, Lillingtons 12/16, 1 PM, Cobra Lounge, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM 
David Bazan 1/20, 8 PM, Sleeping Village, part of Tomorrow Never Knows
Beths 3/6, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 18+
Bleep Bloop 2/15, 9 PM, Bottom Lounge, 18+
Body/Head 3/7, 7:30 PM, Art Institute of Chicago, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM
Roger Clyne & the Peacemakers 4/13, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall
Marshall Crenshaw & the Bottle Rockets 4/6, 5 and 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 11/30, 8 AM 
Albert Cummings 3/28, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM 
William Fitzsimmons 1/12, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 11/30, 8 AM 
Flutes Voices Masquerade 1/27, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+
Foreign Air 4/3, 8 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 18+
Max Frost 3/15, 8 PM, Subterranean, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 17+
Victor Goines & Kenny Washington 2/12, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM 
Ghost of Paul Revere, Charlie Parr Trio 2/2, 8:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM
Grails 1/17, 8:30 PM, Sleeping Village, part of Tomorrow Never Knows
Hives, Refused 5/20, 7 PM, the Vic, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 18+

Il Divo 3/27, 8 PM, Rosemont Theater, Rosemont, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM
Wanda Jackson 3/14, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM 
Elton John 2/15, 8 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont
Durand Jones & the Indications 4/11, 9 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 17+
Kamelot, Sonata Arctica, Battle Beast 9/21, 7:45 PM, Patio Theater
Zoe Keating 4/4, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM 
Kool Keith, Bushwick Bill 12/21, 9 PM, Logan Arcade
Phil Lesh & the Terrapin Family Band 3/7-8, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 17+
Jeremy Loops 4/16, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Makeout, Story Untold 1/12, 7 PM, Cobra Lounge 
Melkbelly 2/2, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Mnek, Tayla Parx 2/25, 7:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM 
Mxmtoon, Khai Dreams 3/6, 7 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM 
Negative Gemini 1/19, 9 PM, Sleeping Village, part of Tomorrow Never Knows
Tim O'Brien Band 3/27, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 11/29, noon 
Old 97's 3/28, 7 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 17+
Ookay 1/12, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
Declan O'Rourke 2/2, 7:30 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 11/30, 8 AM 
Terry Reid 4/25, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM 

Thomas Rhett, Dustin Lynch 9/14, 7 PM, United Center, on sale Fri 11/30, noon
Marc Roberge 2/8, 7 and 10 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 11/29, noon 
Rolling Stones 6/21, 7:30 PM, Soldier Field, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM
Ruen Brothers 2/11, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Thu 11/29, noon 
Snow Patrol 5/7, 7 PM, Riviera Theatre, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 18+
The Suffers 2/16, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 18+
Twiddle 2/8, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, 10 AM, 18+
Two Friends 1/25, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, noon, 18+
Viagra Boys 3/28, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Bryce Vine 2/15, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 11/30, noon 
Yung Gravy 2/21, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

UPDATED

Olafur Arnalds 2/6-7, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 2/7 sold out, 2/6 added, 17+

UPCOMING

Action Bronson, Meyhem Lauren 2/23, 6 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+
Amber Run 12/13, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Anika 1/22, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Omar Apollo 12/7, 8 PM, Metro 
Black Queen, Uniform 3/16, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Billy Bragg 4/25-27, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Brand X 12/8, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+
Bully 12/31, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Cave 1/17, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, part of Tomorrow Never Knows, 18+
Kasey Chambers 1/31, 7 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music 
Charly Bliss 1/16, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, part of Tomorrow Never Knows, 18+
Cherub 1/18, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall
Clutch 3/13, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+
Corrosion of Conformity, Crowbar, Weedeater 2/9, 7:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Daughters, Blanck Mass 3/8, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Direct Hit!, Copyrights 1/26, 8 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+
Dream Theater 3/29, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre
Dave East 12/7, 7:30 PM, Patio Theater
Fleetwood Mac 3/1, 8 PM, United Center
Flesh Eaters 3/10, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall
Marty Friedman 2/13, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+
Good Old War, Beta Radio 12/8, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Guided by Voices 12/31, 9 PM, Bottom Lounge
Icarus the Owl 12/6, 7 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Interpol 2/7, 7:30 PM, Chicago Theatre
Iron Maiden 8/22, 7:30 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park
King's X 12/9, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+
Kiss 3/2, 7:30 PM, United Center
Lemon Twigs 1/25, 9 PM, Metro, 18+
Jeff Lynne's ELO 6/27, 8 PM, United Center
MadeinTYO 3/1, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Massive Attack 3/23, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre
Metric, Zoe 3/22, 7 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 17+
Mineral, Tancred 1/24, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall
Misfits, Fear, Venom Inc. 4/27, 7:30 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont
Graham Nash 3/17, 7 PM, Athenaeum Theatre 
John Oates 1/13, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston 
Anders Osborne 2/9, 7 and 10 PM, City Winery 
Panic! At the Disco 2/4, 7 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont
Perfume 4/5, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre
Perpetual Groove 4/27, 10 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Travis Scott, Trippie Redd 12/6, 7:30 PM, United Center

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Bob Seger & the Silver Bullet Band 12/14, 8 PM, Allstate Arena, Rosemont 
Slander 12/14-15, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
Suicide Machines, Goddamn Gallows 12/28, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+
Richard Thompson Electric Trio 12/7-8, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Kurt Vile & the Violators 12/22, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+
Waco Brothers 2/1, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston 
Ryley Walker 12/28, 9 PM, Empty Bottle
Colter Wall 2/23, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Warbly Jets 2/15, 9 PM, Schubas
We Banjo 3 3/1, 7 and 10 PM, City Winery 
Weepies 12/9, 7 PM, Park West 
What So Not 12/30, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
William Elliott Whitmore 12/13, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Anita Wilson 2/10, 7 PM, City Winery 
Wingtip 1/23, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
With Confidence, Broadside 12/6, 6 PM, Bottom Lounge 
Chely Wright 1/27, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston 
Xibalba Itzaes, Unholy Lust 12/7, 8 PM, Cobra Lounge
You Me at Six 3/2, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge 
Adrian Young 12/16, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle 
Yuri & Pandora 3/16, 8 PM, Rosemont Theater, Rosemont
Thalia Zedek 12/13, 9 PM, Hideout
Zeke Beats 1/12, 8 PM, Subterranean, 18+
Zomboy 2/8, 9 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 18+

SOLD OUT

Alkaline Trio 1/3-6, 9 PM, Metro 18+
Cavetown 12/8, 6:30 PM, Bottom Lounge 
Conan Gray 4/8, 7:30 PM, Bottom Lounge 
Greta Van Fleet 12/12, 7 PM and 12/14-15, 8 PM, Aragon Ballroom 
Beth Hart 4/25, 7:30 PM, Park West, 18+
Ella Mai 3/3, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
Robyn 3/6, 8 PM, Riviera Theatre  



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

CHICAGO ELECTRONIC act **Mutant Beat Dance**—the trio of **Traxx**, **Beau Wanzler**, and **Steve Summers**—dropped their self-titled debut album just days after Halloween, and it's a real monster. Their 25-track post-industrial collection came out on premiere European electronic label and distributor **Rush Hour**, and the vinyl version is a box set with four LPs, a ten-inch, a seven-inch, and a photo book. On Thursday, November 29, Mutant Beat Dance celebrate the album with a free in-store at **Gramophone Records**. The event runs from 6 to 8 PM, during which time all the shop's used vinyl and CDs will be 50 percent off; there will also be free beer and pizza while they last.

When Gossip Wolf checked in on local experimental musician **Anthony Janas** in July 2016, he was preparing to perform on a sailboat rigged with contact mikes and hydrophones—he filtered those sounds through a synthesizer for the piece *Water Has Nothing to Say and Neither Do I*. On Wednesday, December 5, Janas plays in a more conventional venue, **Elastic Arts**, to celebrate the release of his new **Nihilist Records** cassette, *Lucifer, Scooby Doo, and Me*. His instrumentation for this one-off set will be unconventional, though: synthesizer, gong, and pachinko machine. Wish-Fulfillment and Billie Howard open.

In 2015, when Gossip Wolf first caught a set from **Richard Vain**—the solo project of former Ponys and Bare Mutants front man **Jered Gummere**—he was playing his deadly brand of catchy garage rock alone, switching between keyboards and a guitar as accompaniment. On Friday, December 7, **Big Neck Records** will drop **Night Jammer**, the debut full-length from Richard Vain, and it's thoroughly fleshed out with keyboards from Christen Thomas and drumming by Justin Wettstein (who are also bandmates in Storm Clouds). High-lights include “Castles,” with its gloomy, Modern English-style new-wave vibe, and the compact, bristling postpunk jam “Tar Pits.” —J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

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- 11/29 Steel Panther w/ Wilson
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- 12/2 The Noise Presents Atreyu w/ Memphis May Fire, Ice Nine Kills & Sleep Signals
- 12/4 Rittz & King Lil G
- 12/5 Lil Skies
- 12/8 Lucky Boys Confusion **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 12/9 Scotty McCreery w/ Jimmie Allen & Heather Morgan
- 12/10 The Internet **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 12/11 Silverstein w/ Hawthorne Heights, As Cities Burn & Capstan
- 12/15 Sister Hazel 12/16 Sister Hazel Brunch on The BackPorch Stage
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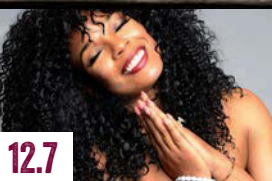
12.2

SUZY BOGGUSS



12.5

JOE PUG
WITH CARSON MCHONE



12.7

SYLEENA
JOHNSON



12.17-18

TAB BENOIT

UPCOMING SHOWS

- 11.29 DWELE
- 11.30 JANE LYNCH "A SWINGIN' LITTLE CHRISTMAS"
- 12.2 JENNIFER KNAPP & MARGARET BECKER
"HYMNS OF CHRISTMAS"
- 12.3 DAVE HOLLISTER
- 12.4 KRIS ALLEN - SOMETHIN' ABOUT CHRISTMAS
- 12.6 THE EMPTY POCKETS HOLIDAY CONCERT
- 12.9 CHICAGO PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER
PLAYERS PRESENT: A CHRISTMAS CAROL
- 12.16 VIENNA TENG
- 12.19-20 KURT ELLING - FEAT. MARQUIS HILL
- 12.21-23 MICHAEL MCDERMOTT - MISCHIEF &
MISTLETOE
- 12.25 CHRISTMAS FOR THE JEWS
- 12.26-27 SHEMEKIA COPELAND
- 12.28-29 MACY GRAY
- 12.30-1.1 AVERY* SUNSHINE - NEW YEAR'S SHOWS
- 1.3-4 MUSIQ SOULCHILD
- 1.5 TALIB KWELI
- 1.6 SONS OF THE NEVER WRONG WITH
MICHAEL SMITH
- 1.7 DAN TEDESCO
- 1.8 SHANE KOYCZAN



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phosphorescentmusic.com

THIS FRIDAY! NOVEMBER 30
VIC THEATRE

ALLEN STONE

FALL TOUR

WITH SPECIAL GUEST NICK WATERHOUSE

THIS SATURDAY! DECEMBER 1 • VIC THEATRE

PARQUET COURTS

WIDE AWAKE! TOUR 2018

SPECIAL GUESTS **COMBO CHIMBITA**

THIS MONDAY! DECEMBER 3 • VIC THEATRE

12 LITTLE SPELLS

ESPERANZA SPALDING

THIS WEDNESDAY!
DECEMBER 5
VIC THEATRE

Holidays Tour 2018

THE WEEPIES

SPECIAL GUEST **MATT THE ELECTRICIAN**

SUNDAY DEC. 9
PARK WEST

FALL TOUR 2018

PINK TALKING FISH

A FUSION OF PINK FLOYD, TALKING HEADS & PHISH

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14
PARK WEST

KURT VILE & THE VIOLATORS

SPECIAL GUEST **JESSICA PRATT** **93XRT**

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22 • RIVIERA THEATRE

SNOW PATROL

WILDNESS TOUR

MAY 7
RIVIERA THEATRE

ON SALE THIS FRIDAY AT 10AM!

THE HIVES REFUSED

Official Swedish **SCREAM TEAM TOUR**

U.S. SPRING 2019

MAY 20 • VIC THEATRE

ON SALE THIS FRIDAY AT 10AM!

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